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MY OWN PAULINE



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HER OWN FAULT.

VOL. II.



HER OWN FAULT.

BY

MRS. J. K. SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

“BROTHERS-IN-LAW,”

&c., &c.

“Gott hat Seelen in Staub gesenkt, damit sie durch Irrthümer zur Wahrheit hindurchbrächen, und durch Fehler zur Tugend, und durch Leiden zur Glückseligkeit.”—*EWALD.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HER OWN FAULT.

CHAPTER I.

BRYAN was very much occupied. He was putting the finishing touches to the pictures he was preparing for the approaching Exhibition; and Sara availed herself of the excuse for taking only one more lesson for some time to come.


She waited till the varnishing day at the coming Exhibition should be past before she would allow Mr. Maxwell to visit her again, and did not blame Charley for slipping away from the room soon after the usual routine commenced, on the morning when Bryan came.

Sara was still hurt with her friend because she suspected the existence of a secret which was not to be shared with her. She

could not be superior to the pardonable vanity of liking to feel herself paramount with her protégée; but she was likewise seriously vexed with herself for her unwise ebullition of temper, and had been scrupulously careful of Charley's feelings during the week which had intervened.

She determined to be at her ease, and to talk to Mr. Maxwell when he arrived as she might to a perfect stranger. She did not look up more than she could help during the lesson, whilst to Bryan every minute was stretched into a greater length of time by a new-fraught consciousness that his secret was betrayed. He saw that reticence was no longer possible; that hour must decide his fate. How was it that he had so little fear of the result? His head swam, and his heart beat with a strange, tumultuous joy.

He spoke of the life of an artist, involuntarily adding a little warmth to the picture. He depicted it in its most alluring colours; and yet it was no deception, but the un-



conscious eloquence of one who really believed in what he was describing.

"I am glad the people are beginning to appreciate you," answered Sara, quietly. "They seem to have departed from their usual rule, in not being a very long time in showing their appreciation."

"Appreciation implies something worthy of consideration. I mustn't hug such flattering comfort to my soul!" answered Bryan gratefully. "Many a better man hasn't fared so well. How many have worn out their lives, waiting for the first-fruits of a success, which has never come to them; I am fortunate—more fortunate than others—perhaps, yet my life must be one of real, hard, unintermitting work!"

"Work is ennobling," answered Sara. "I'm not going to quote the popular Carlylese maxims, and say that it's the great cure for all the misery and meanness of the world; but I should think little of the man who was not proud of working."

"There are people who think differently," said Bryan, with a smile.

"Modern, degenerate people!" declared Sara scornfully, warming to her subject in spite of herself. "I have often wished I could have lived some hundreds of years ago, before the world had sunk to its present dead level. A little more stir, a little less grey routine would be to my taste."

"How do you know," answered Bryan gravely, "that those times were so much better, truer, or more hearty than these? So many of us look to the surface, and form hasty conclusions. We can tell what coat a man wears, we can describe his outward appearance; but we can't tell what conflicts are going on, or what victories are being won, in the invisible mystery which constitutes the real man! I like to know that the Spirit of God has not forsaken us. I like to believe that the innocence of childhood, and the nobility of womanhood, have still power to touch us! Men must be born blind if they can't recognize these things."

This was treading on dangerous ground, and he paused involuntarily, for there was something in Sara's face which made his heart give a bound. "Perhaps," he thought, "my nervousness is infectious, a little of it may have communicated itself to her."

They began to talk again,—of pictures this time. Bryan described a subject for a future picture, which he had long been meditating, and for which he had already made a sketch. It was to be the parting scene between Max Piccolomini and Thekla. A picture of Thekla, kneeling by the seat from which her lover had risen—her white arms thrown across the crimson velvet of the chair, and her face uplifted; with Max standing above her, his hands stretched towards her with a passionate gesture of deprecation—a dumb prayer for reverse of the sentence written in her face.

"You remember the well-known words," said Bryan, "the 'Mourn not for me; go and fulfil thy duty' when the proud soul of Thekla chose honour, and the loss of her lover, sooner than his life and his love."


"The problem for the artist," as he explained, "would be how to represent the face of the woman?" A face, every feature of which should be intensified by the dolour, and yet the glory of the self-renunciation; the agony, and yet the sublimity of self-crucifixion. Bryan wanted to paint Thekla with her eyes looking upwards, as if already she saw beyond the death to the victory; her mouth smiling still, just as it had smiled half a minute before, when her lover's arms were round her, and his breath upon her cheek—smiling the smile which, when he had obeyed her command, she never could smile again.

"But I can't do it," said Bryan, half in mockery at his own enthusiasm, and looking earnestly at Sara.

"No—why not?" she asked.

"Because. I have no model for the woman's face. There can be but one model for that face, for me,—but *one* on earth, as far as I know."

What was it in his voice, his manner, that made the blood tingle to Sara's cheeks,



and that sent a thrill through her—a thrill she could not help knowing it—of secret joy? She kept her eyes averted, lest they should betray her.

“Miss Trevanion,” continued Bryan suddenly, with an undertone of passion still vibrating in his voice, “I want a face which shall be better than what the world calls beautiful. I have a contempt for mere nomenclature; I want a noble face—one that can inspire you—that can shine as an irradiated lamp, with a reflex of that glory of true womanhood of which we were speaking just now; a face which would haunt a man, like a perpetual vision in the darkness, if he were to be so miserable as to lose sight of it for ever. Miss Trevanion, may I ask you? Is it too great a liberty—an unpardonable one—will you sit for my Thekla? You are the only woman I have ever seen who could act—who could show the——”

Suddenly she looked up with cheeks that

were crimson, with eyes that were flooded—
with what? New life, new light, and hope,
and—how much of shame?

“Mr. Maxwell, indeed you are fatally mistaken; you don’t know me—don’t understand me. I couldn’t do as Thekla did. I might possibly enter into the sentiment; but with me it would be a sentiment. We never know our weakness until we are tried; and I—what right have I to believe in my strength? I have lived for self, and self alone has conquered. I’m not high enough—not good enough—to know these things, except in a dream. But I can *feel* them, and I will look them; Mr. Maxwell, if you will be content with that, I will do it when you like.”

He paused, and began to dally again with his brush, thinking of the question which he longed to ask, and deciding that the time had come to ask it. He must risk that question, however fearful the consequences might be.

"You don't know yourself," he continued eagerly. "Do you tell me that you would be less noble than Thekla? that anything would make you choose present comfort, and forego your better self? I know you are denying your own capabilities: that you have a warm generous heart, and could be as self-sacrificing as any of the heroines of whom we read in history. Will you not sit for my Thekla in the sense I originally meant? as one who would be the truest helpmate of the man who loved her?"

He could see that her face had softened marvellously, and, if he had been deaf, or used to interpreting the occasional involuntary movement of the lips, he might have seen that her lips unconsciously syllabled "Yes." But he knew nothing of the unuttered word, and she—— what for? For the senseless reason that so many proud women lose a moment that may never recur again in their lives—because she was afraid he might fancy that she was too ready to please him, she

reiterated "she could not tell till she had been tried."

He answered, this time with an incredulous smile, "I dare to say that I don't believe you. I who——"

He could not finish the sentence, for Charley Masters suddenly entered the room, and took up her usual position with her needle-work at a side-table, muttering some excuse to account for her previous absence. Was it fate or was it accident?—Sara was foolish enough to think in after years that, if there could be any truth in astrological influence, there must have been something adverse in the position of her stars at that moment.

The conversation returned to the usual commonplace, and was conducted in the shortest possible sentences. The lesson was concluded in a very few minutes.

Sara murmured a hurried "Good-bye," and escaped to the quietude of her own chamber, wishing to think it all over in solitude,

and careless of leaving the two, whom she had formerly doubted, together.

When she had gone, there was silence in the room, as Bryan stood, putting up his painting materials, with whirling brain and dizzy eyes. Suddenly he was interrupted by Charley Masters. He seemed to see her through a mist, and vaguely heard her gasping out, "Mr. Maxwell, will you read this?"

He had sufficient presence of mind to take the letter which she held out to him, and turned aside to read it, that she might not notice the unsteadiness of his hand. He had to read it two or three times, before he could take in the meaning of the words.

It was very short. Only a few lines from Mrs. Julian. It conveyed the information that Dorothy Masters had left Tunbridge Wells, a fortnight previous to the day on which the letter was written; that Mrs. Julian had taken it for granted, that the governess had

gone to stay with her sister, and that no suspicion that this had not been the case, had ever crossed the lady's mind; until letter after letter addressed to Dorothy Masters, in Charley's own hand-writing, had continued to arrive at Cedar Lodge. This had seemed strange, and had aroused Mrs. Julian's fears, prompting her to write to the elder sister, and enquire if there could be any ground for anxiety.

"That is a fortnight ago—more than a fortnight, you see," explained Charley, in a voice so altered, that Bryan would not have known it. He looked at her, and saw that her eyes were wild, and her cheeks haggard; she seemed to have aged years already.

"What does Mrs. Julian mean?" she continued. "Oh, Mr. Maxwell—only say that you think it can't be true. Do you know where your brother is? Dorothy knows nothing of the world. She is as innocent as a baby. She might mar her life, before she knew it—only think of the cruel tongues."

Bryan, still in a maze which this letter in-

creased, looked down at Charley with her pitiful scared face, wringing her hands, and entreating him to tell her "what she should do!"

"I must go and find her. I must protect her myself—nobody must hear of it—" she still continued, jerking out her words in short unconnected sentences. "Tell me, Mr. Maxwell. I'm afraid I have lost the power of thinking! Oh, tell me! what shall I do?"

Bryan had recovered himself by this time. He saw that she was febrile and weak with nervous excitement, and answered gently, as if he were soothing a child,

"Did I not tell you that your sister was safe—that henceforward no breath of calumny should touch her? that she could not be within the reach of an audacious thought? I can read this woman—Mrs. Julian—through and through; not only from the cold wording of her letter, but from the crabbed hand-writing. Depend upon it she is ready to form harsh judgments! I dare say she has frightened

your gentle sister; but be sure you don't lose courage in your turn! We must have our wits about us, if we are to get her bravely through."

He spoke more confidently than he felt, trying to quiet the excited girl, who had now sunk on the sofa, unable to stand through the violence of her agitation. Her whole frame was shaking with the effort which she put upon herself to restrain her hysterical sobs.

"You are quite unfit to do anything," he said, touched to the heart at the sight of her grief, "It is better *I* should go and deal with this Mrs. Julian. I have a few engagements, which I must get rid of; but I will promise to start as soon as I can. None of my own affairs shall be allowed to stand in my way. If I once see Mrs. Julian, she will give me the clue, and then you shall help me to find your sister!"

Had Charley's power of reasoning remained, she might have guessed the self-denial which such a promise would involve, and might not have permitted a sacrifice of the kind. But she

was helpless, and even, in the first sharpness of her suffering, a little unfair.

“Is it not right,” she thought, “that he should bear a part of the burden?—is not his brother accountable for *all*?”

She let him try to comfort her with hopes of success, and suffered him to leave her, with a prospect of hearing from him directly he arrived at Tunbridge Wells.

And then, scarcely able to hide how ill and wretched she was, Charley crept into the drawing-room; where Sara, by this time, had rejoined Miss Armitage, and, fearing that her absence might attract observation, forced herself to sit for the rest of that dreary evening, working mechanically like one who had been stunned.

The voices which she heard, seemed to come from a distance; and she found herself answering, wide of the mark.

But Charley’s fits of silence were of too frequent occurrence to attract observation; and Sara was too self-occupied to notice her “odd-

ness." Only when the women separated for the night, and when Miss Trevanion—who since she had been convinced of her injustice to Charley had been unusually careful to be attentive to her—came round to her side of the room, to give her a "good night" kiss, it struck her that the answering lips were cold, almost icy.

"Don't look at me like that!" she said, reproachfully, "as if you would turn me into stone," (Charley little knew in what manner she was looking); "I am glad that I sent for Mr. Spence. He is coming to-morrow, for really you frighten me, you are as pale as death."

Still there was no answer, and Sara's feelings were wounded. Charley tried to speak, but was afraid of the sob which might escape her instead. "Oh," she thought, "for the blessing of solitude—the solitude which heightens wretchedness when it is denied to the wretched."

In a few minutes more the worn-out girl was in the quietness of her own room, able to

yield to the abandonment of her grief. Yet, in that very abandonment, it was characteristic of Charley that she tried to force calmness; and fought with the agony of her feelings, determining to conquer them that she might nerve herself for action.

"Anything," she said to herself, "would be better than this miserable waiting. When, oh, when, would the hours of darkness be over: when would the morrow come?"

Sara, also, in the intervals of her happy dreams, was thinking of the morning. For the morrow, being one of the first days after the opening of the Royal Academy Exhibition, had been fixed between Sara and Bryan, for some weeks past, as a day for seeing the pictures. The ladies were to go to Trafalgar Square before the crowd assembled, at an early hour, to meet Bryan Maxwell, who had volunteered to act as showman.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning was unusually clear and sunshiny. A typical day for the season of the year,—suggestive of the possibility of early May merry-makings in Old England,—with April showers past and gone, and the trees in the parks and squares covered with opening blossom.

London was unusually crowded and gay. Grumbling tradesmen were forced to admit that things were beginning to look brisk; and nearly all the great folk were deserting their country estates, in the perfection of Spring glory, to settle down in noisy thoroughfares, and be distracted in the orthodox fashion with the glare and bustle of the season.

Sara had determined that, whatever might betide, she would keep her appointment, and be amongst the earliest of the visitors to the ill-lighted, ill-ventilated rooms in Trafalgar Square.

She did not attempt to undervalue the importance of the conversation, which had taken place on the previous day between herself and Mr. Maxwell. She knew that he was going to say what would have required a very serious answer; and scarcely regretted the interruption, which had given her time for fresh consideration of that answer. She found that her anxious, doubtful thoughts, thoughts for which she hated herself, had gone, never as she imagined to reappear again. She knew that Bryan loved her. Many men might offer her greater worldly advantages—many might urge her with more powerful rhetoric; but it needed no set speech to tell her, that a greater love than this was never likely to come to her again in this world.

On the previous evening, she would have

been thankful to have escaped from the infliction of company. But, like Charley, she had been anxious to avoid exciting remark. When she retired for the night she had shed tears in her grateful prayers—a rare thing indeed for Sara—and had fallen asleep with her eyelashes still wet! In the morning she awoke with a full recollection of all that had happened, and proceeded to ask herself again, if she knew this man well enough to justify her in placing her happiness in his hands? Her heart answered that this must be her fate, that from the first she had been veering to it, like the needle to the pole. She would make no half-and-half unstable resolves. She would not trifle with a man who loved her, and who was worthy of her love. She would not keep him in the cruel suspense, with which flirting coquettes were apt to torment their lovers. She was no such coquettish girl, but a woman to give a firm, unhesitating answer to his question.

It was characteristic of Sara that, in this

crisis of her life, she never stopped to consider the importance of requiring a "make-weight" in grandeur, or riches. She was apt to undervalue money, looking upon it as no title to social distinction. She had no dread of being lowered by small economies; whatever her training had been in the days of her childhood, her intercourse with Mrs. Armitage had taught her to be superior to such worldly-wise fears.

And as to Bryan's profession—was it not that of Raphael, Michael Angelo, Joshua Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence? She never hesitated to enquire if the guild of artists had, or had not, the same privileges accorded to it, as were accorded to fashionable idlers?

"It will be for me to urge my husband on, to encourage him to success," thought the enthusiastic girl. "Why should he not make a name to be handed to posterity? I will not be so cowardly as to leave my answer vague! As to wearing blinkers to

deceive myself about my love, or as to fancying that I stooped in marrying him, I should only think myself ennobled. Bryan—my Bryan! I would have worked myself to the bone to help him—if we had happened to be poor!”

After breakfast she dressed herself with an elaborate carefulness, for which she laughed at herself. She usually put her bonnet on with undue expedition; but to-day the little innocent vanities of her sex had become more than ever important to her. Alas, for the extremes in her meridional nature! One, more experienced in the wisdom of time, might have prayed her to be calm; might have told her that earthly love had its limits—its divinely appointed barriers—that there could be no rest, no peace in a passion like this!

She was struck with her own appearance, as she saw herself in the glass. There was a brilliancy about her beauty, which sudden happiness had given her—a glory about her

brow—a halo, almost noticeable, of unspeakable joy. Every feature was telling of the intensity of her emotion.

“They must not see this!” she thought, trying to control herself. “Yet I am glad, glad and happy—orphaned in this world no more. I never really lived till now.”

Her heart, on this May morning, was soaring like a lark to the empyrean heights; it was warbling away at the very gates of heaven. Could she help it, if everything were transfigured to her like a glorious dream?

Sara’s thoughts had been occupied so thoroughly with one idea, that she had forgotten the public nature of the place she was intending to visit. Miss Armitage, and her niece, set out early; and, since the room was comparatively empty when they arrived at the Exhibition, it was little matter for wonder, if the over-done elegance of Sara’s toilette, and the unusual brilliancy of her unveiled face, attracted more

observation than was altogether pleasant.

Sara was bent on threading her way to Bryan's principal picture. There had been a sort of understanding between them that this should be the trysting-place.

"He will be there already; waiting for us, counting the moments till I come," she thought, "why should I be ashamed to meet him? He shall see that I am anxious about his painting!" And, with her heart beating a little faster than usual, though she retained full command over her nerves, she dragged Miss Armitage after her, through room after room, never stopping till they made a sudden halt before No. 156.

Aunt Jenny was aware that many eyes were watching them, and instinctively wished that Sara's bonnet had been less becoming, and that she had chosen to put on any other dress.

"It is tiresome," thought the lady to herself. "And yet I don't know how to make Sara understand that if she wears anything at all striking, there is something in her carriage

and figure, which is sure to make it appear remarkable!"

She was right in her stricture; but—if Sara had been as completely hidden from observation, as Æneas was in the mist in which his mother enveloped him—she could not have been more indifferent to the notice which she attracted! It would have been an ordeal to some women, to have walked across these rooms, with so many admiring glances fixed upon them. But Sara moved with such perfect ease, such stately, undulating motion, that many an actress—accustomed to mar her most effective pieces, by the affected artifice of a stage gait—might have profited by noticing Miss Trevanion's walk.

She waited at No. 156. It was Bryan's "Outside;"—still his principal picture for the year, and now for the first time subjected to the ordeal of public criticism. Sara did not look round at once. She felt sure that Bryan would be somewhere near. He would recognize her instantly though he might not like to

linger, too ostensibly, in the neighbourhood of his own painting.

Sara knew that the colour was shooting to her cheeks. She had meant to retain perfect self-possession. She knew that all had been unreservedly given her by the man whom she had purposely come to meet; but it would be a strange thing for her to be forced to admit, that she found herself able to return in kind. Would Bryan wonder at her, for being able to make so ready a return? Would he be struck with her appearance, and think her looking her best? "Of course," as she said to herself, "it would be of very little consequence whether he did or not; for did not all women, after a certain term of years, lose the smoothness from their skin, and the silkiness from their hair; and were they, for that reason, less honourable, less loveable, if those attractions had been surrendered, in duties of self-abnegation?"

"I don't intend to lead an idle life," she thought. "I will spend myself, and be spent in helping my husband. Then God will give me

and careless of leaving the two, whom she had formerly doubted, together.

When she had gone, there was silence in the room, as Bryan stood, putting up his painting materials, with whirling brain and dizzy eyes. Suddenly he was interrupted by Charley Masters. He seemed to see her through a mist, and vaguely heard her gasping out, "Mr. Maxwell, will you read this?"

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THE next morning was unusually clear and sunshiny. A typical day for the season of the year,—suggestive of the possibility of early May merry-makings in Old England,—with April showers past and gone, and the trees in the parks and squares covered with opening blossom.

London was unusually crowded and gay. Grumbling tradesmen were forced to admit that things were beginning to look brisk; and nearly all the great folk were deserting their country estates, in the perfection of Spring glory, to settle down in noisy thoroughfares, and be distracted in the orthodox fashion with the glare and bustle of the season.

Sara had determined that, whatever might betide, she would keep her appointment, and be amongst the earliest of the visitors to the ill-lighted, ill-ventilated rooms in Trafalgar Square.

She did not attempt to undervalue the importance of the conversation, which had taken place on the previous day between herself and Mr. Maxwell. She knew that he was going to say what would have required a very serious answer; and scarcely regretted the interruption, which had given her time for fresh consideration of that answer. She found that her anxious, doubtful thoughts, thoughts for which she hated herself, had gone, never as she imagined to reappear again. She knew that Bryan loved her. Many men might offer her greater worldly advantages—many might urge her with more powerful rhetoric; but it needed no set speech to tell her, that a greater love than this was never likely to come to her again in this world.

On the previous evening, she would have

been thankful to have escaped from the infliction of company. But, like Charley, she had been anxious to avoid exciting remark. When she retired for the night she had shed tears in her grateful prayers—a rare thing indeed for Sara—and had fallen asleep with her eyelashes still wet! In the morning she awoke with a full recollection of all that had happened, and proceeded to ask herself again, if she knew this man well enough to justify her in placing her happiness in his hands? Her heart answered that this must be her fate, that from the first she had been veering to it, like the needle to the pole. She would make no half-and-half unstable resolves. She would not trifle with a man who loved her, and who was worthy of her love. She would not keep him in the cruel suspense, with which flirting coquettes were apt to torment their lovers. She was no such coquettish girl, but a woman to give a firm, unhesitating answer to his question.

It was characteristic of Sara that, in this

crisis of her life, she never stopped to consider the importance of requiring a "make-weight" in grandeur, or riches. She was apt to undervalue money, looking upon it as no title to social distinction. She had no dread of being lowered by small economies; whatever her training had been in the days of her childhood, her intercourse with Mrs. Armitage had taught her to be superior to such worldly-wise fears.

And as to Bryan's profession—was it not that of Raphael, Michael Angelo, Joshua Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence? She never hesitated to enquire if the guild of artists had, or had not, the same privileges accorded to it, as were accorded to fashionable idlers?

"It will be for me to urge my husband on, to encourage him to success," thought the enthusiastic girl. "Why should he not make a name to be handed to posterity? I will not be so cowardly as to leave my answer vague! As to wearing blinkers to

deceive myself about my love, or as to fancying that I stooped in marrying him, I should only think myself ennobled. Bryan—my Bryan! I would have worked myself to the bone to help him—if we had happened to be poor!”

After breakfast she dressed herself with an elaborate carefulness, for which she laughed at herself. She usually put her bonnet on with undue expedition; but to-day the little innocent vanities of her sex had become more than ever important to her. Alas, for the extremes in her meridional nature! One, more experienced in the wisdom of time, might have prayed her to be calm; might have told her that earthly love had its limits—its divinely appointed barriers—that there could be no rest, no peace in a passion like this!

She was struck with her own appearance, as she saw herself in the glass. There was a brilliancy about her beauty, which sudden happiness had given her—a glory about her

brow—a halo, almost noticeable, of unspeakable joy. Every feature was telling of the intensity of her emotion.

“They must not see this!” she thought, trying to control herself. “Yet I am glad, glad and happy—orphaned in this world no more. I never really lived till now.”

Her heart, on this May morning, was soaring like a lark to the empyrean heights; it was warbling away at the very gates of heaven. Could she help it, if everything were transfigured to her like a glorious dream?

Sara’s thoughts had been occupied so thoroughly with one idea, that she had forgotten the public nature of the place she was intending to visit. Miss Armitage, and her niece, set out early; and, since the room was comparatively empty when they arrived at the Exhibition, it was little matter for wonder, if the over-done elegance of Sara’s toilette, and the unusual brilliancy of her unveiled face, attracted more

observation than was altogether pleasant.

Sara was bent on threading her way to Bryan's principal picture. There had been a sort of understanding between them that this should be the trysting-place.

"He will be there already; waiting for us, counting the moments till I come," she thought, "why should I be ashamed to meet him? He shall see that I am anxious about his painting!" And, with her heart beating a little faster than usual, though she retained full command over her nerves, she dragged Miss Armitage after her, through room after room, never stopping till they made a sudden halt before No. 156.

Aunt Jenny was aware that many eyes were watching them, and instinctively wished that Sara's bonnet had been less becoming, and that she had chosen to put on any other dress.

"It is tiresome," thought the lady to herself. "And yet I don't know how to make Sara understand that if she wears anything at all striking, there is something in her carriage

and figure, which is sure to make it appear remarkable!"

She was right in her stricture; but—if Sara had been as completely hidden from observation, as Æneas was in the mist in which his mother enveloped him—she could not have been more indifferent to the notice which she attracted! It would have been an ordeal to some women, to have walked across these rooms, with so many admiring glances fixed upon them. But Sara moved with such perfect ease, such stately, undulating motion, that many an actress—accustomed to mar her most effective pieces, by the affected artifice of a stage gait—might have profited by noticing Miss Trevanion's walk.

She waited at No. 156. It was Bryan's "Outside;"—still his principal picture for the year, and now for the first time subjected to the ordeal of public criticism. Sara did not look round at once. She felt sure that Bryan would be somewhere near. He would recognize her instantly though he might not like to

linger, too ostensibly, in the neighbourhood of his own painting.

Sara knew that the colour was shooting to her cheeks. She had meant to retain perfect self-possession. She knew that all had been unreservedly given her by the man whom she had purposely come to meet; but it would be a strange thing for her to be forced to admit, that she found herself able to return in kind. Would Bryan wonder at her, for being able to make so ready a return? Would he be struck with her appearance, and think her looking her best? "Of course," as she said to herself, "it would be of very little consequence whether he did or not; for did not all women, after a certain term of years, lose the smoothness from their skin, and the silkiness from their hair; and were they, for that reason, less honourable, less loveable, if those attractions had been surrendered, in duties of self-abnegation?"

"I don't intend to lead an idle life," she thought. "I will spend myself, and be spent in helping my husband. Then God will give me

a higher and more enduring beauty, than that which is merely visible to the senses!"

"I should have thought you would be tired of looking at the same picture, dear, when there are so many others to be seen," said Aunt Jenny, breaking in upon her reverie. "Mr. Maxwell's paintings are all of one kind—generally so melancholy, like this, in their sentiment. I think pictures, as well as music, should be intended to cheer one up! I wonder he doesn't aim after a greater variety."

"A variety of works," responded Sara, a little sharply, "is sure to be characteristic of second-rate powers."

She was aware of the sharp ring in her voice, aware that she was beginning to be a little disturbed.

"Where was Bryan Maxwell? Could it be possible that he would allow *her* to keep to her appointment, and not be beforehand to keep it himself?"

She turned her eyes to the masses of crude colour in portrait or historical painting, which, when the canvases were particularly large,

invariably attracted Aunt Jenny's eyes, and excited her admiration. Miss Armitage was wondering at Sara's inertness. It could not fail to excite her surprise that her niece, who was generally so enthusiastic about art, should stand looking languidly at a picture she had seen before, when all the paintings of the year were waiting to be inspected. It seemed the natural straightforward thing to go through the Exhibition in an orderly way, with a catalogue.

"Oh, I see; you want to 'do' it, as an Englishman 'does' the Continent," said Sara, as soon as she understood her Aunt's desire, offering no further opposition to the plan.

She found herself answering from the mark, absently and confusedly, whilst many an "Oh yes!" "Very pretty indeed!" was accorded to compositions which, at other times, she would scarcely have honoured with a glance. When she *did* wake up, she was uncompromising in her condemnation. One picture was "flimsy," another "muddy,"

another "only fit for bourgeois drawing-rooms."

"How can you admire that careless work?" she said crossly to her aunt. "That sky is utterly wrong; there is no purity of tone, no gradation; the motto of it might be '*Guarda è passa!*'"

Eleven o'clock passed; twelve o'clock came. Aunt Jenny was growing weary and was tired of being expected to submit her reason and eyesight to her niece's dictatorial verdicts. The good lady was fairly puzzled on being assured that one ugly picture contained some "very fine symbolism."

"You see, dear, you learnt all this from Mr. Maxwell," she said, apologetically, "I don't profess to understand it. Don't you think we had better sit down?"

"Yes," said Sara, "I am tired to death!" and, ignoring her aunt's desire to "look about her, and see what was going on," she decoyed her to a comparatively quiet corner; for the room was now filled to

overflowing, and she wished to avoid being assailed by officious acquaintances. From her unobserved hiding-place she shot one eager, searching glance, which travelled in a minute over the largest room, where Bryan had appointed to meet her. In that minute Sara had scanned its every corner, and could no longer deceive herself as to his absence.

Instantly she rallied, and plunged into talk, rattling gaily to Aunt Jenny, as if she knew that such rattling would be expected of her. She would not allow that she was chafing inwardly. She rebelled against the sense of bodily fatigue, and was willing to find excuses for delaying their return home.

"There is the Octagon room to be seen still," she said, "and the dungeon for anatomical horrors below. I'll have my bust taken before next year, as a cure for my vanity. It'll be better than a photograph—won't it, auntie? How would it look in this bonnet, for instance? What would the Greeks have said to my head-gear? Oh,

shade of Apelles!—if the spirit-rappers could only introduce it to the fashionable waist-constrictors, who have not yet died out, or take it to Madame Elise's show-rooms!"

Aunt Jenny had not time to urge common-sense, before Sara heard herself called by her name. She started as if she had been struck by a sharp electrical shock. The start was so noticeable, that Miss Armitage could not fail to see it; and, though she was not given to fits of curiosity, she began to attach some meaning to Sara's unwonted paleness, and the sudden nervous changes in her manner.

It was only Mr. Dillon, from whom Sara tried to hide herself in vain, by keeping on the bench close beside her chaperone.

"Like *you*, Miss Trevanion," he burst out in a stentorian voice, which made people look round, shaking her vehemently by the hand the while, to her further discomfiture. "You've more real love of art in your little finger, than most of your fine ladies have

in their whole bodies! A little bird whispered to me that you were here as soon as the doors were open. Now, if it had been a worn-out old fogie of a picture-dealer like myself, inclined to look at the matter simply as a business transaction, one might not have wondered—ha, ha! You should have come to the private view. Why didn't Maxwell lionize you? He isn't up to his opportunities, that fellow! Look there, now—that little man to the left, with his spectacles cocked up on his nose—that's Hammond the critic. Bless you, his principles of criticism are crude—decidedly crude, though they go down with the public, as sweeping aspersions always do; but he's a capital fellow—got the heart of a child."

All this was said in a breath, and Sara, who had felt her heart beating faster, at the first mention of Bryan's name, had time to regain her command over her senses, and answered Frank Dillon with some merry rejoinder.

It was well she had a breathing space, for the connoisseur was thundering again.

"Now tell me, as you promised to do, what do you think of Maxwell's painting? That woman will live on the canvas for ever! It requires strength of heart as well as hand, to depict anything so life-like! It's rarely you get a thing that so nearly hits the medium, without any showy signboard untidiness, and without the microscopic twiddling of Pre-Raphaelism! Maxwell has shaken himself free from all that humbug. He has a wholesome horror of extremes, you see, and yet the details of his picture are noble and harmonious. Did I not tell you how favourably it would contrast with some of the weak, insincere, vulgar handiwork around it?"

"Are you not a little extravagant in your praise?" answered Sara carelessly. "I am afraid you are inclined to over-rate your own friends."

"Maxwell will bear it! It's not easy to make him think much of himself. Such a disappointment by-the-by! Who ever heard

such a thing as his taking himself off in this fashion, without giving me any warning? To-day of all the days in the world to choose, and for nothing at all that I can make out. Met him, you see, tearing at railroad speed to the Waterloo station, at eight o'clock or thereabouts, this morning, and asked him where he was off to? What do you think the fellow had the impudence to pretend? Gave me the go-by without answering my question, except to say he had a reason—a very strong motive, which he could not explain. Motive indeed! Precious prigs these young fellows, but I usen't to think Maxwell was one. I begin to believe in the transmigration of souls. What motive could he possibly have for absenting himself, just when he was wanted? As if his business wouldn't wait till to-morrow. And when he knew that I intended to introduce him to a fellow who is rich as Cræsus, and who means to buy his picture. Ten to one he'll be offended by this slight!"

Was there no one else to be offended by

the slight,—no one for whom the slight had been specially intended?

Sara felt a strange throbbing at her heart. Then her brain became giddy, and a mist came before her eyes. Not a mist of the tears which happiness had made her shed; but a sudden darkness, as if a shadow had interposed between her and the light. She laughed nervously, hysterically. "Surely, Mr. Dillon," she said, "you are too wise to vex yourself about such a trifle. Mr. Maxwell is a character; haven't you found that out? He has been apprenticed in a hard school, which has made him strange and egotistical. I flatter myself I know a little about it, for I have been taking lessons from him, and I must confess I like to study character. I like individuality, even idiosyncrasy; isn't that a long word for you?"

Miss Armitage looked at her niece in some surprise, and her astonishment increased as the conversation continued, and the abruptness and incoherency of Sara's speeches be-

came sufficiently apparent to attract attention. The brilliant colour, which had come and gone during the last few hours in Sara's cheeks, had now altogether disappeared, and had left them of a strange unnatural whiteness. Her restless eyes had ceased to wander, there were no more anxious glances at the door of the room. She felt heartsick and weary, whilst Mr. Dillon was introducing her to some of his friends, and cudgelling his brains for something to say that might amuse her. At last he noticed that she looked pale and tired.

"The room is too warm for you," he suggested, with evident anxiety. "Miss Armitage, we ought to consider the smell of fresh paint, and the want of proper ventilation. Forgive me for volunteering advice, but this is a bad place for delicate ladies. Miss Trevanion looks as if she had overdone it. Let me take you to your carriage. It's the way to get a splitting headache to stay here long."

Aunt Jenny was too glad of an excuse for escaping, whilst Sara, murmuring something about "the necessity for refreshment, and having forgotten her usual lunch-time," accepted the good-natured man's arm, and allowed him to escort her through the crowd. She wished, as she left the rooms, that she had taken the precaution to put on a veil, that the rigidity of feature and unusual pallor of which she was conscious might not become a subject for remark.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN she was in her carriage, Sara leant back, closing her strained eyes, and trying to still her beating heart: yet conscious of a sensation of faintness which she would not acknowledge.

The confusion of words to which she had listened as she passed through the crowded rooms,—the strange babble of human voices, seemed to ring like a monotonous cadence in her ears. It was a relief to be alone with Aunt Jenny: to be free from the mortifying consciousness that the people had been looking astonished at her, and that some of them had whispered wonderingly to each other as she went out. Probably the deadly whiteness of her features *had* been patent to all observers.

She tried to compose those features now, as she said with a forced laugh to Aunt Jenny,

“Yes, Mr. Dillon was right to remind us about going. I had overdone myself with the pictures a little, I think. Tell Drummond to drive as fast as he can. I don’t think I shall care about lunch; but I should like to get home and have some tea. I am never a sceptic about the merits of tea, and I mean to have a cup made quite strong.”

Miss Armitage’s suspicions were easily set at rest, and she prattled on pleasantly and unsuspectingly, without noticing the unusual fact that Sara had little to say in reply. Nor was she aware of the somewhat jarring vibration in her niece’s voice, as Sara gave the necessary answers in sharp sudden jerks, clasping and unclasping her fingers with the impulse of restless pain.

These signs were by no means obvious to Aunt Jenny’s comprehension. Sara was right when she comforted herself with the consideration, that her secret was safe, as far as her

aunt was concerned; whilst she tried to persuade herself against her convictions, that she had not betrayed it to Bryan, though she had flattered herself that she had so clearly read his. And just as Miss Armitage had known nothing of her niece's happiness in the morning, so now she had no possible suspicion of the anger—an anger very different from the mere pettish resentment of a spoilt beauty—which had almost got the better of love in the poor girl's heart.

All through the drive to Curzon Street, during the small-talk which she was compelled to keep up for the sake of appearances, there was a very tempest under her forced composure. Violently impulsive, and passionately intense as she was in everything, she had discovered, for the first time, not only that something connected with her fellow-creatures could touch her to the quick with mortification and resentment; but that she could be, as she believed she was, slighted and forgotten. *She* to be passed over—she, Sara Trevanion, whose

brightest smile had been watched and waited for from her earliest childhood, and that in the very hour when she had been ready to stoop. "Had she not herself to thank," she asked herself contemptuously, as her eyes flashed fire, and her foot beat on the floor of the carriage, with a rapid tremulous motion—"herself to thank for allowing herself to manifest this foolish readiness?" "Had it not been for her too obvious partiality for this—this *drawing-master*" (she dwelt on the title which was so unfairly given, with a sneer of which she was not yet ashamed), "he might have learnt to treat her, at least, with proper respect?"

But she drove away thought. She was not afraid of breaking down before Miss Armitage, for she had not the facile tears which come easily to most women at her command. Hers was the dry-eyed agony of a man.—She tried to convince herself it was not worth thinking of. "Was she not repeating her own meanness and littleness in allowing herself to think of anything so unimportant?"

It was easy to assume indifference, but not so easy to banish reflection. For as soon as they reached home, Sara flung herself down in a chair in her bedroom, and was again assailed by conflicting thoughts. "Had there been some *contretemps*? Was there some possible explanation of the mystery? Could it be that she was peevish with waiting? It was only yesterday that——"

She was interrupted by a tap at the door. Her maid had come to announce luncheon. She must of course go down. Yet her throat was parched, and her heart still beating violently. Everything in the room seemed to be turning round. What should she do? She hesitated over a dose of *sal volatile*, or the red lavender on her dressing-table, and finally put them both out of sight. *She* to need remedies to help her to keep up appearances! Thank Heaven she was still superior to expedients of that sort!

She went downstairs to encounter another cause for anxiety. Charley was out; she had

disappeared by herself early in the morning. "Where had she gone?" for Charley was not given to wandering about London for hours by herself.

Aunt Jenny did not know. There was an uneasiness in her manner as she evaded her niece's question; and a subtle instinct revealed to Sara that something had happened—a something which at present she dared not define, and about which she felt a certain weakness, an unwillingness to satisfy herself. She sat down to the table with a little shiver, trying to hide the change in herself, and saying before the servants, "Oh, she doesn't know the time; she will be in directly." She forced herself to speak, but the words came with a feeling of physical pain; her voice seemed to make her throat ache as she spoke.

The lunch was a farce. Sara's tea was brought in silence. Both ladies kept up the appearance of eating, and commented as little as possible on Miss Masters's disappearance.

Two hours passed. The lunch was taken away, but Charley did not come.

“Did she say that she wished to go anywhere in particular?” asked Sara. “It would not have been half so strange for *me* to vanish. But Charley is so different—so ridiculously over-proper. *I* am wilful by force of always having my own way. But who ever knew Charley alarm us by unnecessary vagaries? And then she has no friends—she knows nobody in London. Do you think she could have met with any accident?”

“I don’t know, my dear—she’s scarcely likely to have been run over,” said the old lady, in a manner that was comically uneasy. “I’m sure I hope there is nothing wrong! You know you are always so impulsive in your friendships. I never liked to tell you; but there were some people who always said that Charley was a little strange, and that the day might come when you would be sorry for the association.”

Sara did not wait any longer, but flew upstairs to the bed-room, which had lately been allotted to her friend. She saw in a moment,

not only that it looked deserted, but that there were appearances of recent packing, and that torn fragments of paper were lying about in confusion on the floor. The drawers were standing open, and were empty. Sara hurried to the door, and encountered her own maid, who was following her full of suppressed curiosity, which she tried in vain to hide from her mistress.

"How is it you are here?" asked Sara, speaking in a sharp voice, to keep it from sinking into a hoarse whisper. "I did not ring. Did Miss Masters leave any message with you?"

"No, 'm," said the girl, trying to cry, "but I thought it would look so strange to the neighbours, for Miss Masters to take herself off in such a fashion, packing up her bits of things, and never asking any one to help her. I never thought much of a real lady, who would wait on herself,—and then sending for Simpson to call a cab—driving off with her luggage, and no one with her. I hope I've been making no mischief! Miss Armitage wouldn't let me tell

you at first. I'm sure I don't want to set no one talking. But to think of a young lady to whom you have been so kind——"

The girl was still whimpering, when Sara turned upon her.

"There is nothing to cry about," she said scornfully. "You will only make matters worse, if you go chattering about them. Go downstairs, and wait till I send for you. If Simpson, or any one else, ventures to make a remark, you have only to say that Miss Masters is *my* friend, and that she is under no control of mine. I was pleased to have her society as long as she liked to stay here; but she had a perfect right to leave my house, when and how she pleased."

The maid disappeared, a little taken aback, to carry the news elsewhere, of how her mistress was "in one of her tempers;" and Sara began to wander restlessly about the room.

A single glance had confirmed the servant's story, and had told her that Charley had left her, abruptly, mysteriously, and un-

gratefully, without a word of explanation. Her instincts told her more,—that this sudden disappearance was probably connected with some unfortunate scandal,—possibly with something which might make her blush for having called Charlotte Masters “friend.”

Already she felt as if she could not forgive Charley, as if it would be impossible to see her again. But she would not judge her hardly. She would seek for the key to the riddle, the solution of the mystery, before she utterly condemned her, or cast her out of her heart for ever.

She commenced clearing away the scraps of waste paper which were littering the floor, when she suddenly caught sight of a torn envelope, which had been apparently forgotten in the haste, and thrown carelessly under the dressing-table. She picked it up mechanically, and commenced reading the address—

“*B. Maxwell, Esq.*
Fitzroy Street,
Fitzroy Square.”

The words were scarcely decipherable, and

the last letters were smeared, as though the writer had been hurried, and had written so illegibly, as to be forced to waste the envelope, and re-direct another.

And yet that writer was Charley, who had been so neat and methodical in her habits. Sara read again—again, with a grey deadly pallor settling on her face, and the shadow of a dim horror dilating her eyes, which held her motionless for a moment, as if by a spell. Her brain was in a maze; but she soon recovered her presence of mind, and began looking eagerly about the room. With the exception of the waste-paper which she had picked up from the floor, there were few signs of carelessness or disorder. But the room had a bare look, and familiar articles were missing.

The toilet-cover was a muslin one, hanging in folds over a pink lining. In her spasm of unaccountable, unreasoning fear, Sara walked round it, and began shaking the trimmings. As she did so a little three-

cornered note, which had been pinned to the lace, and which she could not have helped noticing before, had it not been for her confusion, fell at her feet. She took it up with trembling fingers, tore it open, and read:—

“DEAR SARA, my dearest Sara, for so I will call you, as you said that I might, although you may never allow me to do so again. I am going to leave you. By the time you get this, you will have wondered and been angry at my absenting myself without any explanation. Don’t wonder any more; don’t think anything more about me. It is all I can ask of you, since I cannot tell you why I go. Oh! Sara, dear Sara, I know it will look strange; but you must trust me, without asking me to give you any particulars. You must often have thought me odd, unhappy, and reserved; it was not my secret, or I would have told you all about it. It referred to another person. I was not at liberty to speak of

it. I know this seems a poor return for me to make for all your love, your tenderness, and goodness to an unhappy, lonely girl. I would not have you think I did not feel your generosity. I know you thought me cold; but indeed I was not ungrateful. I *did* love you, Sara. Will you believe this, and in the days to come, whatever you may hear, never think more hardly than you can help of

“CHARLEY.”

CHAPTER IV.

SARA let the note drop as if it had been a scorpion. For some minutes she could not move, could not think. There was a clash in her brain as of iron,—a feeling as if some chord had given way within her, like the sudden snapping of the string of an instrument.

A darkness came before her eyes as she stood silent and motionless, for those first few moments in merciful oblivion. Then she repeated the words of the letter, as if they were written in a dead tongue to her who had taken leave of her senses.

“It was not my secret, it referred to another person. Never think more hardly than you can help; never think—never think

—more hardly—— Merciful Heaven! is she mad! are we all mad? What does it mean——?”

In a flash, as though it were revealed to her comprehension in letters of fire to be for ever and ever branded on her brain, she suddenly saw it, read what she believed to be the explanation—the cruel meanness, the treacherous falsehood of the man and woman she had loved best in the world.

“Charley——and Bryan! Had they used *her*, Sara Trevanion, as a blind? Had they stooped to so miserable, so fiendish a contrivance? Was this the way they had repaid her for her kindness, her desire to load them with benefits? Was it indeed, without varnish or veil, the cold bare truth, the simple solution of everything that had puzzled her?

With a cry of pain, a single muffled cry wrung from her in the extremity of her anguish, such as she never uttered either before or afterwards in the course of her

existence, she took up the letter, and read it once more with a brain still on fire. She read it to the end lingering over it, though it was protracted torture, with her hand pressed over her temples with a desperate pressure, as if to steady her thoughts, so that she might be sure not to be mistaken in any of her inferences.

And then it was as though seven devils had entered into the soul of this woman, who had left her home only that morning with tender eyes and hopeful heart. She was not crushed or stunned, but her passionate sense of the injury as a thing impossible was gone, just as her faith in her fellow-creatures had gone. Her belief in everything good was shaken to its foundations, and her hope had gone; it seemed to her that it could never stir into life again.

In the great agony which had come over her, she was ready to accuse the whole world—even Heaven itself.

There was still a sound in her ears, and a

dizziness in her head, but her blood was coursing in her veins like liquid fire, and she was conscious of the convulsive labouring of her breath. There was no human creature to testify against her, to see how Sara Trevanion had fallen in that hour of temptation from her high estate; how at that moment she looked no longer beautiful, but like one of the poor possessed creatures—torn and agonized by conflicting emotions—of whom we read in the gospel narrative. Her nostrils were quivering with outraged pride, and wild grief was tearing at her heart. It seemed as if her whole nature were rent to its core in that paroxysm of jealousy, resentment, and passionate indignation. She knew it herself—knew, as she tore the note in pieces, spurning the fragments with her foot, that her face of which she accidentally caught sight in the glass, was ghastly, contracted, and degraded with passion; that her love had turned to hatred, and that a baleful fever was in her veins which would leave her weak and exhausted, when the conflict was over.

"Le suicide de l'âme," as Victor Hugo says, *"c'est de penser mal."* To yield to evil thoughts of others is voluntarily to poison all the springs of action—the very fountain of life itself. And as Sara descended to these sepulchral depths of the spirit—the bottomless pit of our own despairing human nature, she did not try to reason or make excuses for herself. She knew that everything seemed formless and unfathomable. But what did the undisciplined girl know of patience or waiting? She flung the idea of religion from her—she who had lived without God in the world.

Suddenly she was roused by the whisper "Sara, Sallie!" and a gentle tapping at the closed door of the dressing-room. She took the precaution to hold the door ajar so as to screen her face, as she answered in the most cheerful tone she could muster,

"Coming directly, Auntie dear, don't you be frightened. It isn't a matter of any consequence. Only I have to put a few things to rights. I can't be in a hurry and leave Charley's

things about. My head aches still too much for me to have any dinner. But I'll come down as soon as the tea-bell rings, and then I shall have something very amusing—not at all tragic, to tell you.”

The footsteps retreated, as Sara had known they would. Miss Armitage seldom disputed a point when she was afraid it would vex her niece.

But the girl sank on a chair with a new feeling of shame. She who had been condemning dissimulation in others—how quickly was she learning the language of deceit.

“What matter,” she argued; “she was driven to it—she had no possible resource. Could she lay her bleeding nerves bare for others to touch them?”

Another half hour passed. And still the strong nature—the great heart of this woman—which God had created for high and acceptable ends, to be well-pleasing to Him for seemed to be perverted, recoiling. The poison had done its work.

into her blood and deadened her faculties. She was beginning to suffer from physical prostration—a weariness came over her—a desire for rest.

She got up languidly as the dinner-bell rang, and heard the anxious whisper, “Sara, darling!” again at her door.

“Coming, Auntie; I don’t want any dinner,” she answered as in a dream, and then taking the scraps of paper and igniting them with a match upon the hearth, she hastened to prepare herself for her appearance downstairs. That appearance was important, as no one must suspect that anything very unusual had affected her.

In the strange unnatural stillness which succeeded the storm, Sara took her resolution to keep her grief at bay. What availed the vehement strength of her will, if it could not help her in an emergency like this?

Like many women of her class, the instinct of beauty was so strong in her, so in-

grained in her very being, that she never could have resigned herself to slovenliness or untidiness. Under any circumstances she must have been careful of appearances, and that not so much from vanity as from absence of thought, it came naturally to her.

She would have avoided looking again in the glass, had it been possible, and could hardly help starting at the sight of her own face, white, scared, and disfigured in its transient alteration. She was conscious that she must be doubly careful of her words, and that she must do her utmost to compose these tell-tale features, or the sight of them might give a strange meaning to whatever came from her lips.

She plunged her face into a basin of cold water, hoping to make the bistre circles less apparent beneath her eyes. And then at last she went downstairs, intending to rejoin her Aunt, with hands that did not

tremble, and with features apparently the same; if a mask which had been shaped in like manner could be the same.

It was as she expected. The unusual "esclandre" which had taken place about Miss Masters, had roused suspicious wonder amongst the servants. Some of them were hazarding conjectures on the subject; others were pitying their young mistress. As she passed down the stairs to the drawing-room, she came upon two of the women, one of them crying, apparently undecided as to whether they should retreat or advance.

Sara was in her steel armour at once.

"Don't you remember?" she said to the parlour-maid, "that I ordered some more tea directly after dinner, because I had a headache. I overtired myself a little at the Exhibition this morning. What do you mean by wasting your time?"

The effect of this speech was much like a sudden shower-bath in cooling the ardour

of the impressionable maids. The prosaic necessity for eating was instantly recognised; and as soon as the relics of the dinner were cleared, the steaming urn and buttered tea-cakes made their appearance in due routine.

Miss Armitage had been waiting patiently but anxiously; and, as Sara advanced, it did not escape her notice that her niece's face was pallid, with lips dry and compressed, while she was struck by its strange but undefinable expression.

"Charley has gone, Aunt Jenny," said Sara, speaking in measured tones, and taking her place at the table as if nothing had been the matter. "We could not expect to keep her always, you know. She left a letter, which has told me something—not a great deal, for she was always reserved—but fortunately it happens that I can, from my own knowledge of the circumstances, supply the rest. She has left me to be married to Mr. Bryan Maxwell. He made love to her, you see,

whilst he was giving me lessons; that is how I know, because I could not help observing. A very natural story—the marriage will be a suitable one in every respect. But it is a pity that Charley was so afraid of telling us about it. It is scarcely the thing to do—to go away like this—do you think?”

With a supercilious raising of the eye-brows, and a little careless shrug of the shoulders, Sara seemed inclined to dismiss the subject, as if it were beneath her notice.

Miss Armitage was not to be so entirely baffled. True, she could not estimate the greatness of the thunderbolt, which had that day been launched on her niece's head. She could not guess that the girl, who seemed so quiet and composed, had actually reeled from a sudden dizziness as she entered the room.

Still she suspected something, and her face was a study of bewilderment. If Sara had spoken with passionate vehemence, if she had complained bitterly of the strange conduct of

Charley Masters, she could better have understood it. But she was alarmed at such unnatural calmness.

"My dear," she answered hastily, "I never heard of such a thing! Charley must have taken leave of her senses. It will set everybody talking; and Sara, child, what is the matter with you—why do you look——?"

"Hush, Aunt, it is only *you* who look strange; it will be noticed if you are not careful, and we must keep up appearances, and manage everything calmly, for Charley's sake. It is only my usual luck, you know. I never had a pet bird but the cat killed it, you remember. I think something happens to everything I love. As to Charley's letter, I tore it up—that was the best thing to do with it. Nobody would have understood it but myself, and it might have led to false conjectures. Don't run away with the idea that there was anything bad in her. Her note was sufficiently truthful and affectionate. But she seemed unhappy—vexed at the way in which she had

acted. The fact is, she was always over-sensitive, and took things to heart, till they preyed on her mind."

"It is a strange, unstable world," said Miss Armitage, musing still in blank dismay. "I had always expected better things of Charley."

Here the conversation ceased. Aunt Jenny had a hundred different surmises to make, a hundred gentle moralisings ready on her lips; but she was one of the few people in this world who are accustomed to curb their tongues, and who instinctively know when to speak, and when to keep silence. Only once in the course of the evening she said involuntarily,

"Don't look at me like that—I can't bear it, dear!"

Sara burst into a fit of laughter, which was perhaps a little harsh, but not noticeably so.

"How do I look, Auntie? Do I look mad? Why, I was never more sane in my life! I wish you wouldn't take to scrutinizing my

looks. You will only tease yourself about nothing."

And she began to chatter in a strain of such merriment, that Miss Armitage hoped she had been mistaken. She tried to persuade herself that there was nothing out of the common in her niece's appearance, and that Sara was only suffering from fatigue.

They separated early, but the last effort at acting cost Sara so dear, that she broke, with a gesture of impatience, from Aunt Jenny's long embrace.

"Don't, don't!" she exclaimed. "I don't know why we should be sentimental;" and this time there could be no mistake—there was a sort of moan in her voice, like that of a dumb animal in pain.

She felt as if the worst was over when she was again in solitude, and when there was no more occasion to keep up the unnatural strain, or to rebel against the torpid, listless feeling which came over her. Was it possible that it was the same blood which so lately flowed

freely in her veins, and the same heart which so lately throbbed with passionate emotion, that now felt like ice, which nothing would thaw? She shivered as she went upstairs, and drew the staircase window down. For the midday, which had been so warm and genial, had been succeeded by a night of one of those slight but nipping frosts, which are often fatal to budding vegetation early in the month of May.

The moon shone clearly in the sky, too clearly for her to see a star, and the shadows of the houses were sharply defined. The outside world was hard and clear-cut, like the world within her. With another shiver she passed on, trusting to her craving after rest, and hoping that the perplexing events of the day would soon be blotted out in merciful oblivion.

"In the morning," she thought to herself, "it will all look different. I shall have my edifice to reconstruct; but I shall be like a child with a clean slate, beginning

a fresh sum. There are other dreams of future happiness to be realised by *me*. Another time I will aim higher. After all, it does not suit me to descend, nor to waste time in self-reproach at my contemptible folly. For I mean to succeed in my life! I have only one life, and an hour lost in a struggle is lost to success."

Yet she soon found that her desire after sleep defeated its own object, and that there was no mental anæsthetic for cases like hers. Her thoughts were chasing each other in rapid succession through her brain. The very numbness of her physical sensations, which seemed to be lulled into utter indifference to suffering, appeared, in some incomprehensible manner, to have conduced to the preternatural acuteness of her mental powers. She rose, after wasting some hours in a fruitless struggle after sleep, lighted a candle, and determined to compose the copy of a letter which Miss Armitage should send, early the next morning, to Bryan Maxwell.

"The letter must be calm and dignified," she thought. "It must be very carefully worded, and must betray no unnecessary interest in his affairs." She could not allow Aunt Jenny to meddle with it. "Dear Aunt Jenny!" she thought to herself; "a kindlier, gentler spirit never tried to comfort those in distress; but I could not trust her with a matter like this. She doesn't understand me; I am a riddle, an unknown moral quantity to her, and shall always be so. Oh, if I had only a mother—somebody to feel for me, more like myself!"

She took up the pen, speculating whether it would be possible for a hand which felt so lifeless to guide it. But the writing was firm and regular as ever, a sign at which she was pleased, as it showed that she had in a measure recovered her self-command. Not that it mattered in this case, as Aunt Jenny must copy the words which she wrote, dismissing Bryan Maxwell from further attendance at her house, and enclosing

an ample remuneration for the lessons which her niece had received.

So the hours passed, and Sara made her appearance at the breakfast-table with an air of ease and comparative satisfaction. She succeeded for the time in deluding Aunt Jenny, who was certainly no great judge of character. Only the servants knew how the furniture had been disarranged, the ink and writing-paper used in Miss Trevanion's room; and how their mistress, if she had slept at all during the latter part of the night, must have slept in the arm-chair. She had been surprised by the maid, who came to call her, and who found her already half dressed, and dozing in the chair. A very unusual proceeding on the part of Sara Trevanion, who always declared that the theory of the healthfulness of early rising was one of the greatest injustices which the goddess of vulgar error could inflict on the human race.

What could it all mean? The conclave

in the kitchen was inclined to put its own construction on the matter; a construction which was not very far from the truth.

CHAPTER V.

THE next few days and nights were passed much in the same fashion. Days in which Sara felt stunned out of all sensation except for a dull, unintermitting pain, which seemed as if it would never leave off. Nights in which she tried to stifle thought on her pillow, and to call her former self-sufficing pride to her assistance.

The two ladies were much by themselves, and the restraint which prevailed after Charley's disappearance, was not favourable to conversation. Even Miss Armitage could not fail to notice how the merry sparkle had died out of Sara's talk, just as the gladdening influence, which had formerly enlivened the household, had gone.

"It was very natural," the good lady said, significantly, "that the shock of that ungrateful girl's behaviour should have had an effect upon Sara's nerves."

Still she was surprised at the toneless voice, the strangeness and coldness of her niece's conduct. All these things were beginning to make her anxious, and such anxiety was acting, with the worst effect, upon her delicate frame.

Charley's offence was condoned by mutual consent. Miss Armitage hushed the matter up, and begged everyone who made remarks on the subject to be discreet. She did not want their private affairs to be bruited abroad, or to become the talk of all their acquaintance.

Then in a few days Aunt Jenny became ill, and Sara had something to occupy her time. Her hours were spent in careful nursing, and she tried to be no longer fanciful or exacting. She made an effort to return to the hard prose of life, but bitterly rebelled

against being obliged to accustom herself to the uninteresting routine. Miss Armitage could often be left with her maid, and did not like to have her niece perpetually confined to her sick-room.

So still there were the long unoccupied evenings which Sara was forced to spend in solitude. The wells of life seemed to be dried up—the freshness, the greenness of everything was gone, possibly, as she thought, never to return. This did not prevent the recurrence of the old question, “what was she to do with her life?” the life, as good as that of many other people, which was still left to her, in spite of her disenchantment. How was she to make the most of it;—to plant fresh flowers, and erase the ugly consequences of the earthquake? How was she to get away from the hidden furnace which was still blasting her heart? Would it not be best to emerge into the outer air, and to accustom herself to fresh scenes?

“I can’t breathe,” she said to herself; “I am stifled while I’m here, thinking always the

same thoughts, and always remembering that acted treachery, which was so much worse than spoken falsehood."

Anything to get rid of these importunate reflections; anything to help her to forget that the grossest insult had been offered to her which it would be possible for any true woman to bear; an insult which in earlier ages of the world could only have been washed out by blood. Was it not despicable, degrading? Could she possibly fathom the cruel depth of her humiliation? Would not the shameful recollection of it remain with her for ever?

She wrote to a friend who had offered to chaperone her, and accepted every engagement that came in her way. And she thought she did wisely, as the "children of this world are wise in their generation."

Old memories might be left behind her; it was time to choose new joys. The best years of her existence stretched temptingly before her. Anything would be better than that *she*, Sara Trevanion, should be chained to monotonous

routine, and should be chafed from day to day with small irritating cares, with a miserable consciousness that her life was out of tune, and every chord within her dissonant. The idea was intolerable; she had too much faith in the strong forces which were contending within her.

"No!" she thought, "I will entirely change my programme! I will lay myself out for society! I will have nothing to do with sentimental illusions, which only lead to stagey nonsense, full of clap-trap. I hate mopish lackadaisical women! No one shall laugh at me in future, as if I could do penance for a mistake. As if, like an empty-headed school-girl, I could flounder into messes of love-making, and not be able to extricate myself."

So it happened, that Lawrence Routh, who had not called for more than a week in Curzon Street, found everything altered. He came prepared to spend an evening with his ward, and was informed by the servant, that "Miss Armitage was ill."

"Nothing serious, I hope?" he asked, a little alarmed.

"No, sir, they say it's a sort of weakness."

"Has nobody been in attendance?"

"Oh yes, Miss Trevanion managed all that, and sent the very night for Mr. Spence."

He was a little affronted that his advice had not been asked. He did not understand it, and strode upstairs to the drawing-room, waiting impatiently for Sara to come down. She kept him waiting for some time. He was standing—rather out of temper—looking out of her window, when the flutter of her dress made him turn round. The question was on his lips,

"What is all this? why didn't you send for me?"

Something in Sara's appearance arrested the words before they were uttered. A something which would not have been noticed by ordinary observers, for her dress was "soignée" as ever, and her eyes as brilliant as usual—if somewhat more restless in their

glances. She had banished the wild look from her face, and stood erect and self-possessed, with stern mastery over herself—unconscious of the undefinable change which had passed over her, and which was sufficiently patent to the keen scrutiny of Lawrence Routh. The look of defiant misery, which she had tried to force out of her face, had deepened every line in it, telling of the tears she could not shed. It was a terrible alteration, which somehow seemed as if it were familiar to him,—as if he had seen that changed aspect of the only woman he had ever loved, in his dreams. For though that same expression had never been in her face before, the possibility of it had always been there.

She was pale, very pale. All her colour seemed to have gone into her eyes, which had increased, not only in their painful brightness; but even in darkness, in greater depth. He was almost afraid to meet those eyes with that strange new light in them, which—again he

remembered superstitiously—he had always felt might come into them, though he had never seen it till to-day. Mr. Routh gave a visible start instead of speaking; a start so obvious, that Sara not only saw it, but was conscious of its cause. The blood rushed for one moment to her cheeks, and then retreated, leaving even her lips of a deadly whiteness. Then she tried to smile. But it seemed to Lawrence Routh as if it were the ghost of her accustomed smile which she was forcing to her lips to hide some inward torture. How different from the light humorous smile which he had been accustomed to see playing on her features, or from the crisp little laugh that had so often gladdened his heart.

“You needn’t be anxious,” she said hastily, leaving him no time to put in the first word. “Aunt Jenny is not quite well, but I think her attack is principally on the nerves. I assure you I feel rather nervous myself, like a plant turning lanky from being kept in a

cellar, after sitting as I have done in her dark room."

He began, "I think I ought to have been told. I always imagine when I don't hear from you that everything is right."

Then he dropped his conscious eyes, fearful lest meeting hers they should betray his sense of uneasiness. He knew she would be certain to resent his conviction that much more was wrong than what appeared on the surface.

"Tell *you*," she answered with one of her unnatural attempts at merriment. "Why, I've enough to do in all conscience, without being hampered by the enquiries of fidgetty bachelors! Have you heard the news? Charley is going to be married to Mr. Maxwell, and so she has taken herself off to make her preparations—to some of her relations I am left to suppose—leaving all the housekeeping on my unpractised hands. And then I have been sitting constantly with Aunt Jenny. I shall stay up with her for the rest of the night, if she is

no better when I return from Lady Vining's."

"*You* going to Lady Vining's ball to-night?" said Mr. Routh, more thoroughly perplexed than ever, yet adapting himself to the lightness of her tone, although he knew her too well for any pretended attempt at gaiety of hers to be able to hide the petulance of her manner from him. "Lady Vining's of all the places in the world—why it is expected to be a perfect crush. *You* going there, and Miss Armitage ill. Inconsistency, thy name is woman! Only the last time I was here, you were bent on leading the life of a recluse—nothing would go down but poetry or painting. And now you are for joining the gayest of the gay."

"Well, and are not women privileged to be illogical," she rejoined, hoping to keep him off with badinage from drifting into sentiment. "Especially the ill-treated ones of the present generation, who have been so cruelly kept in subjection, and not educated up to the stan-

dard of the women of the future. What do I know of algebra, thanks to you, Mr. Routh; and what of Whately or Mill, except what I have read by stealth? I claim it as the most important of my 'Rights,' to be allowed, without questioning or cavilling, to change my mind."

"At any rate, if you are going to Lady Vining's, you must let me go with you."

She shrugged her shoulders in the foreign way which he disliked—shrugged them impatiently, and said something audibly about "plenty of chaperones," and "not being able to fix a time." Then, recovering her fluency, she added, coquettishly as ever,

"What, go to a ball with a non-dancer like you, a 'lump of quickened care,' who wants to rob me of the goods which the gods have sent me! No, Mr. Routh, I know better. Mrs. Sibley is one of those convenient matrons who forget their age, and expect young men to waltz with them. She is too busy whirling away herself, to be able to give a thought to my behaviour."

"Mrs. Sibley," he said gravely; "I don't like Mrs. Sibley. A fashionable dashing woman, but not a good companion for a young girl like you. I don't say there's more harm in her, than there is in most empty-headed women of her stamp. But I pity her own daughters when she has to bring them out."

"If my friends are to be attacked, I would rather have them attacked openly," she answered irritably. "I wish people wouldn't make thrusts in the dark. It is half phrases which do all the mischief in the world. When my own turn comes to be run down in this way, it'll be a good deal more agreeable to me for people to speak outright."

"You may be candid," he answered, really hurt, "but you are certainly impolite. A little while ago you were indulging in cant about the shams of society. I tried to make you remember then that there might be rare ingots, real, rich nuggets of pure ore, to be discovered amongst the gilded rubbish which passes

for gold. I tried to keep you from indulging in sweeping condemnations, to make you believe that a little more experience would take the cutting edge off your hastily-formed opinions. And now when you are ready—not only to agree with me, but to run to the opposite extreme—I find that my advice is to go for nothing, that my position as your guardian is to be only a nominal one.”

“I did not mean to shock your sense of propriety,” answered Sara, still speaking bitterly; though with a slight feeling of shame, a sort of wonder that she could be so unlike her former self. “But I *have* changed my opinions, and altered all my adjectives. I dislike to hear everything nice called ‘wicked,’ and to have everything disagreeable dubbed by the name of ‘duty.’ I know that is privately Aunt Jenny’s creed. I never said it was yours. But your opinions are practically as hard to bear, and I tell you plainly, sir, that no one can attempt to tyrannize over me, without having to confess himself beaten in the end.”

She concluded her speech with a little courtesy. But Mr. Routh did not smile. He was deep in thought. The girlish action was the same, but its naïveté was gone. She could no longer coax and wheedle, with unconscious dramatic effect.

And so Charley Masters was going to be married to Bryan Maxwell,—a sort of marriage which he never should have imagined to be at all likely to take place. And yet, when he came to think of it, it was not otherwise than suitable.

He spoke his thoughts aloud.

"I suppose the painting lessons will cease. As Mr. Maxwell is to be married, he will take a holiday, of course."

"Yes," she answered briefly, as if she did not wish the subject to be discussed. "You know it was always my way to take fits of things. I have done with painting for the present, and shall turn to something else."

"Did you go to the Exhibiton, as you

intended, on the 3rd? Is it a good one?"

"I can't say I saw it properly. We took a hurried view of it—quite enough for me."

"How very odd!" he said, still speaking his thoughts aloud. "Why, I thought you had some real taste for art; and you certainly used to be an enthusiast for it."

"Enthusiasm is only another word for insanity," she answered impatiently. "I must go to Aunt Jenny, I think, now, Mr. Routh. She will be wanting me, and if I talk any more I shall be tired before the evening. Surely I am young enough to be allowed to outlive my delusions. As to the Royal Academy, it's the greatest mockery in the world, to be obliged to listen to stupid people applauding they don't know what. If I *had* any real love of art it would be sufficient to make the place a purgatory to me."

He was keen enough to see that he had touched a painful chord. Perhaps it was his professional experience which taught him that

he should be unwise to overpush an advantage.

At any rate he said nothing more on the subject, and equally avoided any question about Charley Masters.

"Don't think of staying up, after you come home to-night," he said, as he took his leave. "I shall call to-morrow to hear how Miss Armitage is going on. If it is merely a nervous affection, there can surely be no occasion for any one to sit up, and Mr. Spence can treat her as he usually does. But if she should seem at all worse, I should take it in time, and ask him to let you have a second opinion."

"Oh! it isn't half so serious as that. It is only the weakness which requires care," answered Sara. "She doesn't mind *me*. But we sent the paid nurse away after the first night. The idea of anyone strange only frightened her. And nothing tires me. I think I am made of iron."

She was physically cold as the metal to

which she had likened herself. As they shook hands at parting he was astonished to find her so,—her fingers seemed to him as those of the dead.

He held her hand for a minute, scanning her with an eagerness which he could not control.

"You are not well," he said, "you will want the doctor next."

"It is nothing," she answered. "I am cold from want of exercise. Dancing will do me all the good in the world."

Sara had begun to speak more like herself. Yet a sharp instinct told him that she was altered, mentally, and morally, as well as physically; that some shadow had passed over her which could never be entirely withdrawn, and that it was the effort of her will contending against her anguish, which had produced the rigidity of muscle, and tension of limb, and which seemed to petrify her into a statue.

Her girlhood had gone. He

beyond a doubt. The naïve abandonment which he had once admired, the kitten-like freedom of movement which had been so bewitching, suited her no longer. He wished she would not attempt to simulate these things. There was something distasteful in her efforts to recover a phase of being that had passed.

"She always had a natural turn for acting," he said a little bitterly to himself; "I wonder what that turn will develop into now."

He did not like to think of her as an untested possibility. And yet, he knew what her girlhood had been, but nothing of the womanhood which was to come. He was almost terrified to remember the unusual strength of character, which he had noticed in her from childhood, and which might degenerate into hardness.

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"Some plastic natures pass through the fire," he thought, "and can be moulded into any shape, like malleable metal; others are

tempered—as she said of herself—into the unyielding iron, or cutting steel.”

He felt, as he left the house, as if the crisis of his fate were at hand. Was he not as inflexible in his determination, as unbending in the firmness of his will, as Sara herself? And when man and woman were so equally matched, were not the odds of the chances greatly on his side,—was it not more than likely that the man’s nature would dominate over that of the woman? Had he not waited patiently for weary years, holding invisible threads cautiously in his hands, separating them, or intermingling them in “multiform combination” towards a far-seen end?

He had blamed her in the last interview, he had thought severely of her recklessness, he had been fearful for the result!

Throughout all his infatuation in the past he remembered that he had been far from joining in the exaggerated estimate of women in general which had been formed by the fanatical philogynists of the day. “Women

are neither better nor worse than men," he had been wont to say cynically, when the subject was discussed; "they are in fact just as foolish—only weaker." But like many men of his stamp, he had found it pleasant to believe in one startling exception to the average rule. An exception which had stunted all the rest of her sex to dwarfish dimensions, or swept them altogether from a place in his recollection.

It was bitter to him to be obliged to change all this. And yet Sara, consciously losing her nobility of spirit, and lowering herself voluntarily from her high estate, was still infinitely dearer to him than any other woman could have been, in her striving after goodness. Still the pity of it—the pity of it! Did it never occur to him that he, who was responsible for so much, had never put the highest aims before her, but had spoken to her as if selfishness were to be one of the preponderating motives of this life? Pagan himself, had he made her a pagan?

For once he forgot ~~himself~~, thinking pitifully of her, ~~as of~~ a jewel that had been tarnished.

"My darling—my darling!" he thought passionately. "Could I not save her from this? I, who would be racked in every bone, if such a mode of torture existed in this century, to save her from suffering. But there is no such thing as vicarious pain. Is it *my* fault that it is given to *her* to endure the agony that must work out my purposes, and accomplish our happiness in the end?"

Thus it happened that neither the man nor the woman, each bent on working out his or her reckless will, ever remembered that there can be no light defiance of that

"Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we may;"

and that they who "sow the wind must reap the whirlwind."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ball at Lady Vining's was to be an exceptional affair. The hostess, having a weakness for amateur histrionics, tableaux vivants, or whatever was picturesque, had made a request to her particular friends, that they would favour her by appearing in fancy costume.

Mrs. Sibley had laid a special stress on this point, and held solemn consultation with Sara, a few days before the ball, on the subject.

"Make yourself as pretty as you can," she said; "I want all my friends to be struck with you. You see I am interested. I want to contribute *my* quota to the adornment of the rooms."

"Make herself pretty!" What satire it sounded to Sara. The Siren who mourned because she was not immortal, weeping as her victims were drowning around her, never loathed her own beauty, and her fatal golden hair, more than Sara hated her loveliness now.

I think it was the spirit of bitterness and desperation, which decided her to turn the thing into a mockery, and to appear in the costume of Dante's Beatrice.

"Most dresses," as she explained, "are so terribly hackneyed; and I must choose a simple one, as there is so little time to prepare."

Mrs. Sibley caught at the idea with eagerness. The fitness or unfitness never occurred to her.

"Capital!" she said, clapping her hands. "You must copy all the details from Ary Scheffer's picture. It will be so novel—it quite takes my fancy."

So the matter was settled; and when Law-

rence Routh left her, Sara—having heard that Aunt Jenny was progressing most favourably, and that she wished to be left to sleep, under the care of her own maid—began preparing for her toilette with mixed sensations.

At first she commenced it wearily, with listless fingers, and eyes averted from the reflection in the glass. She hated the sight of her white neck and shining tresses—hated the elegance of her harmoniously-proportioned figure. She felt the bitterness of the satire in which she was indulging at her own expense, as she unclasped the buckle from her slender waist, and arrayed herself in a robe of spotless drapery, adorned with a border of Greek trimming in silver. What was the good of seeing that the dress suited her to perfection,—what comfort was there in feeling herself to be beautiful?

She had given way to the pleadings of her maid to allow the innovation of the silver trimming to lighten the severity of the costume; and she had permitted a few diamond

flowers to be mixed with the green leaves round her head.

"It is not the right thing," she said; "but what does it matter?—it is the tinsel which they adore—let them have it by all means!"

Latterly Sara had worn her hair in simple classical fashion. She knew it was Bryan's taste, and instinctively had discarded any unnecessary ornaments. Her jewels had remained hidden, lest they should remind him of her wealth. But the diamonds became her, and the effect was brilliant.

"I mean to enjoy it," she repeated to herself—"to make hay while the sun shines—what is there to prevent me? It does not do for me to act on the theory which Aunt Jenny would be glad enough for me to adopt—that all amusements of this kind should be reserved for the wicked! If they were, Heaven knows *I* have no reason to plume myself on my goodness."

Her maid told her that her eyes outshone the diamonds, and—though Sara smiled scorn-

fully at the compliment—in reality she did not think it exaggerated. Her heart began to swell, at the remembrance of all the power which still was hers—the means of victory which she had only to use. New sensations were beginning to overpower the old ones.

Just as she was ready, they brought her a bouquet of white flowers—Stephanotis, lily-of-the-valley, azalea, &c.,—her hot-house favourites, arranged with the most exquisite taste. But she guessed the donor, and her first caprice was to exclaim,

“Take it away, I can’t wear flowers with this dress.”

She looked again, and saw that the flowers were becoming—persuading herself that there was really nothing in the bouquet to jar with the general effect of her costume.

“Why should I be fastidious?” she said. “What does it matter to me whether they say I give him encouragement or not? At Rome one must do as Rome does,” and she took

the bouquet hastily without leaving herself time for further thought.

Mrs. Sibley had already called for her, and was waiting downstairs, equipped in a dress of black velvet, with bodice of cloth of gold.

. "I am delighted to hear that Miss Armitage is nearly well again! It would have been a thousand pities if you had disappointed us to-night!" said the lady, sunning over with smiles of approbation. "Exquisite, admirable taste—as if you had dropped from the skies. A little want of harmony perhaps with the dreamy character. That light in your eyes and that flush on your cheek are humanly bewitching, no doubt, but they remind a little too much of this world of flesh and blood. And if I might make a suggestion to complete the effect, my dear, I should say not quite so much of the finished style of the *grande dame*. You look like one of Nature's peeresses—enough to drive your admirers to despair. But Beatrice should be

more simple,—a sort of mingled sublime, you know, with simplicity.”

Mrs. Sibley put her head on one side to reconsider the effect—tapping Sara on the shoulder condescendingly with her bespangled fan. Sara winced and shrank a little back. The cool ignoring of her personality for the sake of enhancing Mrs. Sibley’s triumph was offensive to her pride.

“I suppose it is her *métier*,” she said to herself, “to flatter the girls whom she chaperones in this disagreeable fashion.”

She leant back in the carriage, keeping herself as much as possible from being drawn into conversation, and taking refuge, on the plea of being tired, in monosyllabic answers till they arrived at their destination. Then she waited patiently for her companion’s train to be shaken out, and for the gold stars which that lady wore in her hair to be altered and rearranged—knowing that she herself needed no correcting touches.

The rooms were already crowded when

they made their appearance. The scene was not only a gay one, but tasteful as well as amusing. The fittings were Frenchified, with panels of white and gold alternated with plate glass. The hostess had resided for many years abroad, and prided herself on her specialty for these arrangements; delighting in illuminating her rooms with a blaze of light, and in placing evergreens and pyramids of hot-house flowers wherever she could find an excuse for them, in spite of the John-Bull objection that the effect was "gingerbread."

The dresses were of a kind to be usually found at such entertainments. There was the impossible Titania, with her gauzy wings artificially stuck out on a framework of wire; the Queen Elizabeth enduring purgatory for her offences, with her neck in a vast pyramidal vice; the inevitable Knight Templar, the red-stockinged Mephistopheles; the Lady Jane Grey; and strangest of all, innocent young girls who had chosen to represent one of the most ghastly periods of modern time.

Let us hope that neither they nor their mothers had ever studied French history, and knew nothing of the details of the reign of Louis XV.

Mrs. Sibley had not been wrong in her prophecy as to the effect which Sara's appearance would be likely to produce. Ross-with Maxwell, whose usual rôle was to be all languor and carelessness, had arrived early in the evening, and was lounging near one of the doorways, taking accurate notes of everything around him. He was beginning to be bored by some of these surroundings, the nobodies who were present instead of the somebodies who were absent, the gaseliers instead of wax-lights (gas was so vulgar), when he was suddenly roused into life by the remarks which were made on Miss Trevanion's arrival.

He was struck by the more finished style which her beauty had gained. Yet he was perfectly well aware of the flushed look of conscious triumph, the haughtiness of bearing which he had not noticed before. There was the same

refinement of brow and nostril, the same grand line of neck and chin, set off to best advantage by the folds of white drapery. But Rosswith was keen enough to detect a change; it was rather to his satisfaction than otherwise, that there should be something in the Beatrice which savoured of this earth.

"A dazzling creature," he said to himself, "whose fortune might not only enable him to weather the storm, but whom many men might love with mad unreasoning passion." Dorothy had been pretty, with a soft harmonious prettiness, a perfection which had been invariable and rather wearying. Involuntarily he began to compare her innocent looks with these other bright eyes which were flashing intelligence, this fascination which was more bewitching than beauty. "Plenty of blood in her," he continued in his refined reflections, "such a specimen of high breeding as is rarely to be seen. Yet she is changed somehow, *I think for the better*, though she looks as if she'd had an illness."

He had only lately been told by one of his friends, whom he had sounded about his prospects, that it would be of no use "attempting to lay siege to the heiress;" "there was nothing to be done in that quarter at all." "True, she had been out very little—they had cooped her up from the world, but there was something in her manner which kept people at a distance. Lots of men would try it, if they thought it would be any good; but a girl like that seemed to be born simply to turn men's heads, and avenge the wrongs of the rest of her sex."

Rosswith was not so easily to be beaten out of the field. He set store by the encouragement which Sara had given him in the past. He knew that the bolder game was always likely to be the most successful, and his attention fastened greedily on the flowers which she held.

She might have left the bouquet at home, he remembered; and yet his confidence was so great in the power of his own attractions, that

he would have ventured a tilt for her, even if she had done so.

But now his pulses beat faster with hope. He had wanted this woman's gold, but he was being caught in the meshes of his own skilfully spun devices. He was nearer to being a second time in love than he had ever thought possible.

"Plenty of blood in her," he repeated, "whilst many an heiress was no better than a patched-up Rosinante."

There was nothing abhorrent to Rosswith's feelings in this fashion of likening a woman to a high-stepping horse. Both horses and women were in a certain sense marketable commodities. The style of simile came naturally to him; and, as he stood unseen by the doorway, and heard the comments of other men who were admiring that ease of movement in Sara's carriage, which was the joint result of bodily health and careful culture from her childhood, he was by no means inclined to quarrel with them for the downright nature of their outspoken praise.

At times Rosswith Maxwell could be shrewd, coarse, and even bitter, and hard; though he had always the outward bearing of a gentleman. He had two natures—the one not without generous impulses, and the other, by force of habit, reckless and cynical; though, like many poor wretches before him, he was stifling the promptings of the former nature, and burying it under the gross burden of the latter. Even now, as he looked at Sara, tender memories of little Dorothy came before him.

“But it was all for the best,” he sophistically argued, “both for her sake and his.” He was not much afraid of having risked the consequences. “Dorothy was possibly just a little delicate. Yet those women, who looked as if every breath would annihilate them, had generally plenty of stamina; and such gentle little creatures invariably managed to hold their own even when they were placed in the most trying positions.” He was not, as he said to himself, at all sorry now that Bry-

an had interfered. "Monstrously unpleasant such interference at the time, but he was glad he had put it all straight with Mrs. Julian;"—it made his conscience more comfortable about the campaign which was before him.

What were his chances? He thought he would watch and see for himself if it were Miss Trevanion's fashion to favour all other men with the same signs of approbation which she had shown to him. Fortune encouraged him by an accident; for just then an aristocratic fop, chiefly remarkable for the care which he lavished on his person, for an interesting pallor caused by late hours and a want of fresh air, and for an affectation of speech which he studiously cultivated;—a creature of whom the barest sight would be likely to inspire Sara with absolute detestation, had managed to get an introduction to her, and was asking her, with an air of assurance, to give him the next waltz.

She looked at him from head to foot, as if

she would take his moral and intellectual measure, and then saying, in her quietest voice, "I really have not made up my mind whether I shall take the trouble to dance at all to-night," averted her eyes, and left him to retire with a feeling of extinguishment.

"Miss Trevanion is so haughty that she is downright rude," was the comment of some ladies who were standing near her; whilst the discomfited waltzer lounged away with a sullen face, to revenge himself by declaring that "that girl must have been educated somewhere in the backwoods of Canada," and hinting mysteriously that she was—notwithstanding any appearance to the contrary—the "biggest flirt he had ever met with."

Meanwhile Rosswith Maxwell, who was more thoroughly experienced in the science of making himself agreeable, and who had sufficient tact to study the humour of a woman before he endeavoured to edge himself into her good graces, thought it was time to encounter his fate.

He discovered himself just as Sara was beginning to feel that sort of intoxication to which she was liable in all scenes of excitement. The rhythm of the music seemed to be beating in her head, the lights were swimming before her eyes, and the whole room was in a maze to her bewildered senses.

Rosswith did not ask her to dance with him at first. He waited patiently by her side, content that her card should remain unfilled, and satisfied that she should make the peculiar nature of her costume an excuse for sitting out. Meanwhile he was not idle. He could show that he had mastered the art of pleasing to some purpose, not wasting his attentions or even allowing his eyes to rest upon the attractions of any other woman in the room. He was not too assiduous. He did not court her openly, but threw into his manner just the proper amount of deferential gallantry,—just the air of respectful admiration which chanced at this crisis to be soothing to Sara's feelings. She, who had been

surfeited with compliments from her childhood, till they nauseated her, was not aware of her vulnerability to this style of oblique flattery. A flattery which was not openly expressed, but insidiously hinted by every word and gesture.

Rosswith abstained for once from talking of himself, from an instinctive recognition that such talk would not please her. But he remembered how he had made a "hit" by telling her about his tenantry, and determined to allude to the same subject again.

"You don't ask about Collingford," he said. "I think things are beginning to look up there a little. The village is just in its first spring glory."

"Collingford." The name was familiar to her ears. She remembered her last conversation with Bryan, and recalled how she had been told that this was Bryan's brother, the elder brother, of whom never an ill word had been spoken in her presence; he who owned the estate, and whom men delighted

to honour. Then it proved that the old leaven was still working in her heart. Rank and fortune were not distasteful to her, as she had imagined them to be. Vanity was beginning to take the place of vanished love.

"Would it not be better," she said to herself, "to be mistress of 'The Towers,' than the wife of a painter still struggling for position?" Bryan, she thought, had toyed with her, had reserved the most cruel insult for her which it was possible for one human creature to pay to another. But this man, his brother, his superior in wealth and social advantages, was ready to bow down to her, to set his neck under her foot. Should she do well to spurn him from her?

She looked at Rosswith again. His figure was better proportioned, without that stoop which Bryan had, and which was decidedly a disfigurement. She tried to persuade herself that Rosswith's manner was distinguished—his evening costume in good taste. He was never by any accident badly dressed,

and disdained showy studs and unnecessary rings. Certainly he could still look striking by candle-light—like some descendant of the Cid, with his dark un-English aspect,—when the signs of fast living were undiscernible in his face. And to do him justice, bad and hardened as he was, he had shrunk from many of his past associations since he thought of addressing himself to Sara as a lover. He had kept sober for days for the chance of seeing her, and now he began to feel almost certain of his prize.

Sara's own desperation and her indifference to consequences were helping him forward in his mad determination. It was a breach of etiquette as well as a public sign of favour, that she should have allowed herself to alter her resolution when he urged her to dance.

But "Mr. Maxwell," as she explained, "was such a capital partner—he danced so smoothly, so easily, and get over the ground so fast; and then it was getting so late in the evening

that she need no longer be bothered by thinking about her dress."

"And you know," as she said to Rosswith, "in my secret heart, I have wished my dignity at the bottom of the sea all the time. I am so thoroughly fond of a dance. If I had been a savage I could have danced myself into a frenzy. I can believe all the stories they tell of the Tarentella."

He listened in secret triumph to her sophistical excuses, content with the knowledge that they were whirling round the room, the observed of all observers; whilst Sara's draperies were brushing the feet of other men whom she had refused.

He could have wished for no more favourable conjunction of circumstances. He thrilled with egotistical delight at the certainty that it must be sufficiently obvious, to others besides himself, that Miss Trevanion had singled him out for marked signs of approbation. Indeed he began to feel as if her lot were so inseparably connected with his, that ad-

miration paid to her was so much incense swung for him. He would have been content to pace for ever round the room with Sara leaning on his arm when the waltz was finished, being pleasantly conscious of the remarks which were made as they passed.

Some of the remarks happened to reach Sara's ears, and a sort of vertigo came over her. She could think no more, she was beginning to be overpowered — stupefied, as she fancied, with the atmosphere of the room.

"It is desperately hot," she said, fanning herself vehemently. "Can't we find Mrs. Sibley? I must have some air."

"I don't expect you will see any more of Mrs. Sibley for the rest of the evening," answered Rosswith, with a meaning smile—congratulating himself on the fact that Sara was not hampered by any "veteran campaigner," who might barter her and her fortune to some more eligible suitor. "The old system of chaperonage was a nuisance, which has fortunately

exploded. Let me take you to the conservatory, and get you some refreshment."

"I am very warm," she repeated, "the heat is making me ill." She was conscious of a longing to get away from everything—to bathe herself, if possible, in the coolness of solitude.

"Are you not afraid of taking cold?" he asked with an air of tender solicitude; she was beginning to listen with more complacency to the softness of his speeches.

"Oh no—anything to escape from this!"

They passed into the conservatory, where the air was refreshing. The arrangements here, as elsewhere, were elegant of their kind; but, like all the other adornments of Lady Vining's house, a little inclining to exaggeration. The pavement was inlaid with arabesques of coloured tiles. A fountain sent up its jets of spray amongst orange-trees, laurels, and masses of the hardier ferns. Lamps, casting a subdued rose-coloured light, hung from the roof of glass; and there were curtained recesses sup-

plied with velvet cushions, which were tempting to stragglers from the adjacent rooms.


"The architect of this greenhouse must have been dreaming of the Alhambra," said Sara, as she sank wearily on one of the cushioned seats. "I suppose everything can be procured in London, if one has only the money."

She was trembling and irresolute, with a perfect sense of what was coming upon her, a latent horror of it; and an undefined feeling that it would be necessary to stay and face it, as she must face everything which would come to her now. She prided herself on always having self-command, ready for every emergency in life, not knowing that there was peculiar danger in this confidence.

Rosswith was not slow to see his advantage. For the present they had the conservatory entirely to themselves, but after the next dance they might be interrupted; and he determined to dash boldly at the task he had undertaken. He had a good voice, well mo-

dulated in its intonation; under any circumstances he would have been careful that his words should fall musically. But now he did not need to take the pains. In Sara's presence his assumed languor had been cast off like a garment, and he had even hovered round serious subjects which he had a feeling of hesitation in touching. Hitherto he had found it difficult to adapt himself to her calibre. But now the passing admiration, the compliments which he had overheard in praise of Sara's beauty, had fired his enthusiasm. He was eloquent, with an eloquence which needed no effort.

And thus it happened that the man who had set himself to win this woman's hand, because he wanted her gold, and because there was "nothing else left for a fellow to do;" and the woman who had fallen into the bait because she was drunk with pride—mad with lacerated self-love, fevered and consumed with—ah, who shall say how much of!—vain and hopeless longing, were both hurried



on beyond themselves by the force of circumstances. "It was destiny," as Sara afterwards tried to persuade herself. "Surely they could not help it—it was to be."

She who prided herself on never being caught in a cunning leash of smiles, on her utter indifference to the sugared words of men, now listened as in a dream to Rosswith's tale of love.

He promised her wedded happiness; he drew pictures of future bliss.

"You can help me in everything," he said. "My world centres in you. Since I have sunned myself in your eyes, everything else has been forgotten. I shall be saved by their light," he added in unconscious blasphemy, carried away by the passion of the moment. A passion as different from the solemn intensity of real love, as the artificial flash of a fire-rocket differs from the quiet star which palpitates in the sky.

As she listened it seemed to her that all this had happened before, that she had heard

the same words in some previous state of existence. For the aromatic perfume of the flowers, the smell of the prussic acid in the laurel leaves around her, increased the sensation of faintness from which she was suffering. She did not hear the concluding words of Rosswith's speech. Everything was blank to her for a few moments; and when she woke again it was to find him bending over her, trembling in every limb,—white to the very lips.

“Is it possible,” she thought to herself, “that he could be so overcome by a trifle if he did not really love me with a pure disinterested love?” A love which, it seemed to her, had she been less proud, might have come like a fresh draught of water to the lips that had been parched with intolerable thirst.

She did not know how all-important her answer was to him—how in the moment of her brief unconsciousness, when he had feared the result of that answer, he had entirely forgotten his admiration—his transient senti-

ment; how the spectre of blank ruin had stared him in the face, and made him ghastly with cowardice. Had she guessed this, she would not have fallen into the snare of listening to his words, and giving him credit for the all-absorbing strength of a great emotion.

Rosswith was surprised in the midst of his delight. He had not expected such immediate success. Even in the flush of his triumphant excitement, when he hoped from the fact of her answering nothing—from the casting down of her eyes, and from the constant toying with her fan, that her silence would give consent, a lurking suspicion crossed his mind that there was more beneath these nervous movements than appeared on the surface.

And when, with a blush that dyed her face the colour of crimson, she lifted her eyes suffused with a sudden moisture, and piteously, not proudly, intreated, as though she did not see him, but was looking beyond him at something in the distance, "I beg you not to urge

me. Don't take advantage of me now. I am not in a fit state to think," his self-conceit received a shock, and all pity was destroyed in him, all thought but of himself.

His transient passion turned to anger. Her entreaty for mercy clenched his resolution. Her half confession steeled him against her, he was not the man to abstain from taking advantage of any mysterious "circumstances." He could not give this "cold calculating woman" up, who was ready to yield to him—evidently not from any tender feeling, but for certain reasons of her own, which she could not even tell him. It was galling to his vanity, but he wanted a wife with money, and determined that after marriage she should be subservient to his will. Now was the time to bind her, when she acknowledged her weakness; afterwards, if need be, it would be time to teach her to be meek.

Sara never knew in after years how it all happened, what fatal talisman it was, what spell which bewitched her; but in a few

moments more the irrevocable words had been spoken, words which in her proud code of honour were as binding as an oath. She had gone into the conservatory free, if tremulous and doubtful. She came out of it bound, fettered in every limb, with no holy light of love in her eyes to make slavery tolerable, but conscious of the desecration and mockery of the whole thing.

"Let us go," she said wearily. "Other people will be coming. We must return as we came, or some of them will be wondering. You have no objection to the engagement being kept secret for a few days?"

"Not the slightest," he answered eagerly. "Everything shall be as you wish."

She suddenly stopped, and looked him full in the face, putting her firm white fingers round his hand.

"Mr. Maxwell, I wish you perfectly to understand. Let there be no misconception with which you may afterwards reproach me. I—I don't know much about love—the romantic

ideal doesn't suit the nineteenth century. But I am willing to marry you,—is that sufficient? quite willing—that is all—are you content?"

"Yes," he was content, or he said he was. He would have said anything that suited her at that moment. But a close observer might have seen a tightening of the lips, and a hardening of all the lines of his face. What, after all, did he want with the love of this haughty woman, who grudged the sacrifice and spoke so bitterly to him? Had he always been so unattractive, so unloveable? Ah, he remembered, with a sudden pang which cost him dear, he whose heart, if he had any, was far away from this contemptible farce;—ah, where was it? A vision of sweet sad eyes suddenly came before him—a little pathetic face that was quivering with pain, a childish rosebud of a mouth which once had pouted for kisses, eyes looking for faithless eyes which never again could meet them,—Heavens! what had he done?

He wiped the moisture away which stood

in beads on his forehead, and told Sara he was content if only he might call her his under any possible condition.

And she, pushing away a velvet curtain which screened the conservatory from the outer room, put her arm again into Rosswith's, and stood face to face with Lawrence Routh.

One glance at him, and she knew that he had heard their last words. He did not move, though he was standing in full view of the situation.

It was altogether a surprise that her guardian should be here. His own restless feelings, and a suspicion of unknown danger, had driven him to Lady Vining's house. He had not meant to pursue any system of espionage. He was too much a man of the world not to know how to be conveniently blind on the interesting occasions which are common to all ball-rooms. But now he forgot the rules of etiquette as he stood rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed on the couple before him, with his heart beating as if it would knock a pass-

age through his ribs; great thumps which seemed to take away his breath, and to deprive him of his usual command over his actions. He knew that he was looking strangely, but he could not have helped it, even if the look had been unpardonable. This discovery was so much worse than his worst anticipations, and he instinctively felt that the whole of Sara's future welfare was concerned in the result.

There was a thunderous silence. No one spoke for some moments. Rosswith's brow lowered darkly, the ugly flush was on his face. He bit his lip as he glanced at Sara, who was nervous and self-conscious. She was evidently uncomfortable at being discovered so suddenly in an entirely new position. The possibility of shirking the truth might have occurred to another girl, but Sara was too proud for any evasion. The silence was an awkward one, but she was the first to break it.

"Mr. Maxwell is my partner," she said,

with marked emphasis. "Will you allow us to pass? the dance is beginning."

"Oh, certainly!" answered Mr. Routh. Then he smiled a grim smile. His self-possession was too far gone for him to recover it at once. Great interests were at stake, and as her guardian he must speak. He added, in a husky voice which sank into a whisper, "Are you acquainted with the antecedents, with the private history of this gentleman to whom you have given leave to serve under your banner?"

Sara crimsoned with vexation, but she made him no answer. She would not be called to order, or put to shame, as if she were a child. What right had Mr. Routh to interfere in her concerns? He was presuming on more than a father's authority, and what was *he* to her?—his power was at an end.

She flashed an indignant, defiant glance in his direction. Then Rosswith felt her hand tighten on his arm, as she stood with her head raised, and her whole attitude erect,

the incarnation of angry, indomitable will.

Rosswith gave a little chuckle. It was not worth while for *him* to waste his powder and shot, since Sara was ready to turn upon the enemy, and since it seemed that after all he should have to thank Mr. Routh for making his ward more decided with this timely interposition.

“Will you dance?” he said to Sara, looking provokingly collected, and taking no further notice of the lawyer’s interruption. “People will be surprised if we block up this entrance. We must go back as we came. I see you don’t mean to be ashamed of my protection.”

The defiant look left her face as, with an involuntary sigh, and features that were whitening, she prepared to rejoin the dancers.

Lawrence Routh heard the sigh, and drew his lips together with an expression of bitterness. What remained for him to do to save this girl from herself? But a little; yet that little must be tried—it was his duty.

He planted himself firmly in their way, and forced them to look at him, so that Sara could not fail to be attracted by the unusual pallor of his cheeks, and by the eyes which were glittering under his shaggy brows with a strange new light.

"At what hour can you make it convenient to see me to-morrow, Maxwell?"

He spoke the words calmly with suppressed passion in his voice, but with a glance that said plainly enough,

"Remember, I know all about you."

Rosswith answered with mock politeness, "At any hour you please on another day, sir; I shall be engaged to-morrow."

"Well, say the day after to-morrow. Friday?"

"Four o'clock, then, I am at your service."

"Good night, Sara," and with a bow they passed.

"It is well they have gone," thought Lawrence Routh, looking after them, and endeavouring to reassume the mask which hid him

from the world. "Heaven only knows what I might have said or done."

"Mr. Routh is privileged to be a bear, I believe," sneered Rosswith to Sara, when they were out of hearing; "but I should have thought that *you* could have tamed even the worst of Bruins."

She did not relish the remark, but was too weary to resent it; and she remembered that Rosswith had had provocation.

Again and again during the hour which ensued, Rosswith shot glances at his promised wife's face; eager, impatient glances, to make sure of his fate. The result was satisfactory. He read a certainty of safety in the expression that never changed. Albeit the hard set line of the lips, and the dulled eyes that never wavered, contained something beyond him, which he cared not to decipher, but left as a dead letter.

He was not altogether happy, for he occasionally caught sight of Mr. Routh in the distance, and it was irritating to know that, as

long as the lawyer lingered, he was to be subjected to the keenness of his critical inspection.

"He watches one as a cat does a mouse," he thought, sneeringly. "It's his vocation to play the spy, but his interference is unendurable. If it were not contrary to the rules of civilized society, I should like to make him feel the force of my knuckles."

It did not occur to him to reflect that there might have been an equal longing on the part of Lawrence Routh, to knock his client down then and there, as he deserved; and that it might chance that the older man, in spite of his grey hairs, would prove himself the better adept of the two in the mysteries of the fistic art.

For if Rosswith was dissatisfied in the moment of his triumph, what were the feelings of Sara's guardian when, after a short interval, he plunged into the outside world to cool his heated brain? He could scarcely see the dusky park dimly shadowed in the dawn, and was unconscious of the few pale stars which were

fading from the sky. He bared his forehead to the wind, and strode forward with hasty steps, calling himself ugly names for his blindness and incapacity.

"I'm an idiot—a dolt—a blockhead," he thought, "not to have seen a hand's length before me. I ought to have been aware of all this with only half an eye. Yet I can't imagine how a woman of her vaunted sense should make a blunder of this sort, and prove herself so weak."

He fancied he could have borne his disappointment better, if he could only have seen Sara looking into an honest man's face with a true womanly, confiding glance. But that it should come to this: it was horrible, unendurable.

Meanwhile the cause of all this heart-burning was leaning back in her carriage, hoping to hide the weary look of her eyes, and the deadly pallor of her cheeks, and looking at the dismal grey of the morning with a shudder which she could not repress, not daring to re-

fect or to allow herself time for self-pity. She was spared superfluous questions from Mrs. Sibley, who relieved her by falling asleep; but the coming home was a fresh ordeal when every familiar object brought the past again before her, and reminded her of the irrevocable.

She tore off the flowers, and snatched the diamonds from her ears.

"Make haste, only make haste," she said irritably to her maid, "I'm tired to death. I can't stand upright. What a time you are with the dress—never mind it—cut the lace—don't wait to undo it. I think the room was too hot—it has given me such a headache," and she pressed her hand on her burning temples, muttering to herself—"what have I done—oh, what have I done? I'm sickened with my own absurdity."

When she was left alone she fell prone on her bed and groaned aloud in her anguish, feeling lowered to the very dust. A sense of burning, horrible, intolerable shame seemed to

bewilder her very senses, coming like a mist before her eyes, making her whole frame quiver. But if for one moment the hysterical agony overwhelmed her, it was known only to her Maker. She controlled herself instantly, it was never her way to weep or bemoan herself.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE was no occasion for Sara to carry out her romantic resolution of sitting up during the remainder of the morning hours in Aunt Jenny's sick room. For Aunt Jenny had been sleeping during the time of the girl's absence, and was sleeping still,—a calm restorative sleep. Yet Sara could almost have wished there had been some excuse for disturbing her. She was beginning to dread loneliness. Her pride was too intense to allow her to indulge in the luxury of self-abandonment.

Yet it was necessary to re-establish herself in her own good opinion, which she did by sophistical argument, to the effect that in this transition state of the world's history there was little or no room for the free election of

the heart. Genuine worshipful woman-love might be all very well in theory, for the past; she put it away from her as overfanciful for the present.

"We can't have everything," she thought, continuing her argument. "One door to the good things in life must necessarily be shut to us by the same mysterious agency which opens another. Why can't I be satisfied with a better position before me? Why can't I be glad?"

Why indeed? It seemed to her as if she had reversed the usual order of destiny. Fresh adversity had come to her by apparent prosperity. Her heart was certainly heavier than it had been even the day before. It was a tragical enigma, she could not account for it. Indeed she could account for nothing. Life seemed to her as it seems to all of us when we voluntarily choose the evil, as if it were all a hopeless lie, a miserable burlesque. As if her soul were staring like a naked eye into the darkness; a darkness which was painful, which could be felt but not fathomed.

There was something awful to her in it; something which frightened her in feeling that her thoughts were contradictory, that she could not arrange them. On the one hand there was a terrible power in the idea that Bryan Maxwell and Charley Masters had made her their dupe. She had allowed the thought to become dominant, till it was laying hold on her, as if it would bring her to the verge of Reason. Yet when she remembered her engagement with Bryan's elder brother—the brother whom she could not love, but who loved her, as she believed, with passionate devotion—she was perfectly well aware that there was a vindictive triumph in her heart, which was as terrible to her as it was new. And by the side of this strange triumph stood the ghost of her dead joy, the shadow of what “might have been,” a conscious ghost which she could not slay; it seemed as if it were endowed with an independent existence.

“I am very cold,” thought Sara, as she

wrapped her dressing-gown round her. "If such a thing were possible as having ice in one's blood, or if people ever had brain-fevers—they never do except in novels—I should think I was going to have one."

Seven o'clock struck. The tormenting thoughts were becoming duller, yet she could not utterly blot them out. She felt indifferent and almost stupefied, and began to yearn after the physical comfort of resting her aching temples on the pillow which was still unpressed. Still sleep would not come. For there is no ache like the ache of conscience, no sting like the sense of forfeiture. Physical evil seems to be transmitted with the spiritual. Any dislocation of the faculties, any disordered moral condition, must necessarily entail restlessness as the foremost of its curses.

Eight o'clock chimed from the London churches; the morning was bright and clear. "But oh!" thought Sara, "for those waters

of Lethe of which the ancients dreamed—oh, for some blessed forgetfulness!”

A sudden thought struck her. Miss Armitage might be awake; she would creep into her room and see. And, hastily putting on her slippers, she went on tiptoe to the door, turning the handle softly.

“Dear Auntie,” she said tenderly, when she had satisfied herself with a peep, “I was so anxious to know how you were going on.”

“I am much better, darling. I have had such comforting dreams.”

And the pretty delicate face, in its old-fashioned bordered night-cap, smiled from the bed like a waxen effigy of peace. What a dear, wrinkled face it was! “How much more beautiful,” thought her niece, “are such worn faces, with the stamp of goodness on them, than many of the egotistical young ones which people admire.”

“But you know you are to have your

breakfast in bed," she answered. "Mr. Spence said we must be very careful of you; and I don't mean to let you get up till he comes. So I thought I would come and keep you company, if you will let me."

"What time did you come home, child? You look ill and tired."


"I think it was somewhere about three o'clock. Mrs. Sibley wanted to stay longer," answered Sara evasively. "I am not at all ill; only a little cold."

"Why, Sallie, it is eight o'clock, and you ought to have slept till twelve."

"Yes, dear, I know what the time is, and am quite sufficiently lazy, you know. But I thought you would be awake, and would, perhaps, get another nap if I came to keep you company."

She settled herself by her aunt's side, nestling closely to her, her teeth chattering with cold.

"Aunt, love me," she said suddenly throwing her arms round her,—*"love me always,*



whatever I do. Why did my mother die and leave me?"

"Darling, I think you are over-excited—these balls are too much for you. I wish I could get you to think as I do about them."

Miss Armitage was really alarmed, not knowing how to comfort Sara, and feeling herself to be a coward at heart, so fearful was she of playing with edged tools which she might not be able to handle. She had suspected from the first that something must be amiss with her niece; and anxiety on this account had hastened her nervous illness. She was not one to burst in with religious common-places, and to bid Sara think at this crisis of her eternal interests. But not the less did her lips move in prayer for the girl, that God would help her and comfort her in this strait. With the prayer on her lips, Aunt Jenny fell asleep. The words were left unfinished; but prayers like these find wings. Sara felt soothed and comforted. She began

to be released from some of those stinging thoughts, which for the last few hours had coiled like serpents about her heart.

"I will go out again this evening," she thought. "Anything to forget myself just for the present. Invitations will pour in directly I want them."

At ten o'clock she rose, and dressed herself for the day. Outwardly she was collected, allowing nothing to ruffle her, and giving orders about the household as if no elements of discord had entered into her life. She prided herself on this nonchalance, this apparent indifference to pain.

"If I had been passed under saws and harrows of iron," said the girl, with her usual exaggeration, to herself, "I would have tried not to draw back or utter a cry. It would be a matter of shame if I could not bear what other human creatures have had to bear before me."

But this mood did not last.

When Miss Armitage came down in the

middle of the day, she was more puzzled than ever by the change in her niece. Sara rattled on about the events of the previous evening. In the fashionable abuses which she naturally disliked, she had always found targets for the sharpening of her wits. Hitherto her satire had been comparatively harmless, but now her arrows were likely to leave a festering in the flesh.

“Oh! the ridiculous costumes!” she said. “I could laugh myself into fits at the bare recollection of them. Fancy old Miss Drew, with all those lines in her face, coming out in the sweet simplicity of a charity-schoolgirl! She thinks she could deceive even Death itself with her tricks; but the rouge was so bad, that any one could see it. And that conceited Miss St. John must needs go as Mary Queen of Scots,”—and here Sara gathered up her dress, raised her shoulders, drew down her lips, and paced mincingly round the room in imitation of Miss St. John’s affected manner.

"Don't, Sara," pleaded Miss Armitage, looking pained and surprised. "She has no one to teach her better, poor dear; and there's a great deal of good in her."

"What a pity the 'poor dear' should be such a horrid bore!" answered Sara, shrugging, and looking offended. "I was only trying to amuse you, you know—what I said was not meant personally. Other people are at liberty to take exception to *my* manners."

She relapsed again into silence—breaking it after a time with a nervous trepidation which was altogether new to her.

"Aunt Jenny," she began, jerking out her words, "I have something to tell you. Mr. Routh will be here directly; and if I didn't tell you, *he* would. I am engaged to be married to Mr. Rosswith Maxwell."

With all her kindness and cordiality, her unwillingness to wound anyone, the elder lady could not conceal her amazement. She looked at the girl in a puzzled, bewildered way.

"Nonsense—now I am sure you are over-excited—you can't mean what you say."

"Yes, I *do* mean it," continued Sara quietly, trying to speak in stilted language, which sounded unnatural from her lips. "There can be no manner of question about it. I was engaged last night. I thought you might wonder at it, as I have known him for so short a time, but the case is exceptional.—I hate prevarication. I couldn't stoop to it if it would help me; so I won't pretend that my heart is deeply interested. But my word has been given—there was abundant reason for it. There, Aunt Jenny—I would rather you didn't question me. A woman is different from a man, you know, and I can't be bound to tell outright the whole of my secret thoughts."

The cold, hard tone, the strange precision of the sentences, jarred painfully on Miss Armitage.

"Mr. Maxwell—Rosswith Maxwell?" she mechanically repeated, as if she scarcely took

in the meaning of the words, and then gave another look of mute enquiry at her niece.

"I wish she would leave it alone. What possible good can come from her asking questions about it?" Sara was saying bitterly to herself. "Of course she can't understand me. She would need experience under any circumstances, to make her sympathize with me, even if I were happy—she, who never passed through any alternations of feeling in the whole of her placid common-place existence; she, who has never known anything of the rapture of loving or being loved."

Sara was right in one sense; they could not understand each other. How little we know of the secret feelings of those who are most dear to us! What a tragical farce lies in appearances! How entirely unconscious was this hot-headed girl of the outworn woman's little romance—a romance which had been stowed away in the hidden recesses of her memory—dead and buried thirty years ago, with just a single dried flower, and a torn yellow letter

put away out of sight in the secret drawer of her old-fashioned desk, to convince even herself that it was no delusion of her fancy. An episode quickly acted, and quickly over, but which left an empty, untenanted heart—swept and garnished—not for the habitation of evil spirits, but for God's angels to come and occupy it.

It was the remembrance of this little story of her own, which made Miss Armitage faintly essay a mild expostulation with her niece.

"Rosswith Maxwell," she repeated again. "You have indeed known him for too short a time. Child, take care of what you are doing?"

Sara turned on her with flaming cheeks,

"Aunt," she said, with a gathered intensity of passion—"please not a word more about it. I told you I wouldn't be cross-questioned. I can't see things in your way. You know it is too late. Why didn't you come to me when I was a child? I have been brought up in a different atmosphere from yours. I have had

a different training," and a shadow of resentment still hovered over her face, as she continued in explanation, "I shall make a proper wife to Mr. Maxwell; a very proper wife, according to the modern fashion, which has its limits, I'm thankful to say. But as to any absurd, romantic ideal of pretending to see with my husband's eyes, to linger lovingly on his accents, or to listen for his footsteps,—Aunt, you may be sure I shall never gratify any human being by making a goose of him like that! What I have to give, that I give to Rosswith Maxwell, and no man will ever be able to exercise any greater power over *me*."

Poor sensitive Miss Armitage—who was so essentially a peace-maker that her special mission seemed to be to turn away wrath, and who felt that this was one of the subjects as painful for her to enlarge upon as it seemed to be irritating to her niece—remained silent for awhile, following Sara with her eyes as the girl moved about the room nervously and restlessly—set-

ting everything to rights with quick movements of her fingers.

The same instinct which tied Miss Armitage's tongue brought unbidden tears to her eyes. The silence was becoming awkward; at last she broke it.

"But, Sara, you have not told me; what does your guardian say?"

"What he says or does not say is nothing to me! In six months I shall be twenty-one, and then we shall see how much power he has over me, he or anyone else," muttered Sara under her breath.

"Sara, Sara, why do you talk like that?"

"Like what? I'm a free agent. I can't pound myself into a jelly, or make myself conveniently soft for taking any mould which Mr. Routh may require. It's time I was free from leading strings—Is that all you have to say to me, because I think we're wasting breath? I daresay Mr. Routh is like all other guardians. I take it for granted that he may have the prejudices of his class, and give himself

an enormous amount of trouble about nothing."

Miss Armitage's tears were falling now.


"You don't remember your poor father," she murmured. "He had so much confidence in Mr. Routh. And Mr. Routh has been so good to you. You are not yourself, dear, you are ill. It is only illness which can account for such behaviour."

Sara came close to her, and put her arms round her.

"Don't trouble about me. I'm perfectly well, auntie. When anything crushes me it will be time for you to cry."

"But you are changed again, Sara," said she, putting a tender old hand on the girl's proud head. "Changed sadly for the worse! A little while ago I was so thankful for the improvement! I thought my pretty lioness was turning into a lamb."

"Leave me alone," said Sara gently. "Indeed you can know nothing about me. I don't fear, believe, hope, or trouble much about any-



thing. I can't help it, auntie dear. I think I must have been made so. And what is the use of speaking if, when I say one thing, you only imagine I mean something else? How can I explain my thoughts to you when they are all in a tangle even to myself? What is done is done. And if there is such a thing as 'golden silence' about these things, I'm sure it must have been made for people like me. Let us love one another, dear, without breaking it again."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the afternoon came Lawrence Routh. He was shown into Sara's boudoir, the room in which she had received her painting lessons from Bryan Maxwell. He looked at the pretty disorder around him, the open piano littered with music, and the gay worsteds for some feminine embroidery strewn here and there, as she had scattered them in a vain attempt to work. He looked and sighed.

A sigh was so unusual a luxury with him that probably, if anyone had accused him of indulging in it, he would have indignantly denied the imputation. It was a mere unconscious effort of nature to relieve a dull ache which he could not bear. Then he fell into a reverie, and was hardly aware of his

ward's presence, till he suddenly saw that she was standing before him.

He looked at her with an anxious glance, which Sara at once resented. She was neat and pleasant to the eye as usual, with her wavy hair carefully bound up in a thick roll round her head, and was dressed in a pretty becoming costume of some delicately coloured cashmere fit for the season. She had been scrupulously particular to prevent any outward sign which his keen eye might detect of that desperate excitability which had been working like poison in her highly-strung organization. She was aware of the strength of Mr. Routh's judgment, and fearful of the prophetic insight with which he might foretell the misery of her future life. She had hoped to succeed in eluding his penetration. But the change was more apparent than ever to his eyes; a change which told of a nature perilously constituted, now for the first time brought in contact with utterly perverse instincts.

Sara knew that her guardian had come armed with a whole battery of remonstrances, and greeted him in a way which was intended to show that she was perfectly well able to hold her own against his shot, and ready to encase herself at once in any amount of defensive armour.

No wonder that he missed the old winsome manner, when she had been ready alternately to coax and to bully, to tease and to caress. There was no coaxing now. For the idea of interference was galling to Sara's pride.

"She would not submit," as she said, "to be drenched with other people's good advice. As to Mr. Routh, what right had he to interfere?—what right to interpose between her and her determination?" Her heart revolted at the idea of the discussion of her private matters, the probing of her wound by any man under the sun—guardian or no guardian.

After the first surprise this cold composure seemed to fit her like a garment, as every new mood fitted Sara in turn, though it chang-

ed her from the playful kitten to the haughty bearing of a queen.

"You have something to say to me," she said, thinking it better to cut through any difficulties at once, to make the ordeal sharp and short.

She spoke in a harsh staccato way, and involuntarily he contrasted it with the usual tones of her voice, tones which had been clear and ringing as those of a bird. In spite of his usual composure he felt himself confused, and was conscious that he was growing violently red. There was no change in Sara's complexion as she stood looking at him, proud of her new aplomb and decision of manner, and of her tendency to see everything with hard defined outlines, which seemed to give her an individuality which she had never possessed before.

He answered gravely, "Have *you* nothing to say to *me*?"

She felt her patience going. This fencing was aggravating. It might force her to state

facts which she would rather leave unsaid. She hesitated for a moment, and Mr. Routh looked at her again with one of his critical glances, as she stood erect, with her little head thrown back, and the small teeth gleaming in her mouth, smiling a strange smile, and determining she would not flinch from the necessity of answering.

"You know all," she said. "What more is there for me to say? I am pledged by everything that is honourable to marry Mr. Maxwell. I have given my word, and of course I can't go back from it."

"This is coming straight to the point. I thank you for your candour," he said, trying to speak gently. "But there may be certain considerations connected with the matter, which I think it becomes my duty to put plainly before you."

He paused, finding it difficult to explain himself easily.

"Well," she said, impatiently, "I am waiting for your exordium," and she attempted another

laugh. But he winced again at the shrill nervous sounds of her voice, strained to an unnatural height.

"It is *not* well," he said gloomily. "It is very ill; you have done yourself a great wrong. Does it not strike you that you are young to be so off-handed?—that it was imprudent, to say the least of it, to have been so precipitate in giving your promise; and that, if you had acted with your ordinary common-sense, you would have consulted others who knew something about Mr. Maxwell's antecedents?"

"You speak peremptorily," she answered. "I might have known you would do so. Do you think that though you dictate to me exactly how I am to act, I am likely to do just as I am bidden, like a scolded child? What if you happen to know Mr. Maxwell? You *do* know him, I believe—his family connexions, and——"

"I know him," he answered, calmly; "his *character*——"

Sara looked at him suddenly. Their eyes

met for an instant in a long level look, equally steady on both sides. But the eyes of the girl were defiant and contemptuous, whilst those of the man were fireless and passionless. Steel-grey, stony, and impenetrable as they were, it was hopeless for her to attempt to see anything behind them. But who could say by what vehement effort of the will they had been rendered, for the time, so absolutely expressionless?

“Do you know, or care to know, anything about his character?”

“Sir!—Mr. Routh!” she exclaimed, controlling the secret trembling, the quivering of resentment which shook her in every limb. “Do you mean to insult me? Is he not my affianced husband? As if it were likely that I should listen to a tissue of nonsense, when you know you can never restrain people’s tongues!”

“It is *not* nonsense,” he answered in the same quiet tone. “I wish that it were—that it were impossible for me to believe you could

bind yourself to a man who has mixed himself up with what is wrong and dishonourable."

"I will not believe it—he has not got it in him." She tried to steady her voice, which had abated in sharpness, but which shook just a little, in spite of her efforts to control it.

"There are some scrapes for which a fellow may be readily forgiven. But I don't fancy Rosswith Maxwell's belong to that category. He may be amusing in a certain way. He is of the 'flash in the pan' sort, if you like, with a showy kind of cleverness—a man who can spin you a yarn on any given subject, retailing phrases as if they were freshly minted from his brain, and choosing fine words by the dozen to hide his shallowness. He's too clever by half, even in throwing baits for unwary heirs. If you don't believe me, ask the men with whom he has gambled; ask the tradesmen who are his creditors; ask the——"

"Really!" said Sara, interrupting him with an air of cold surprise. "Mr. Maxwell must be your *bête-noire*, I suppose. You allow yourself wonderful liberty of expression in speaking of the man who is to be my husband." And she flashed out one of her wild defiant glances, which made Mr. Routh's heart sink down like lead.

He saw that the accusation had been a false move on his part. In speaking of Ross-with's conduct, he had taken it for granted that Sara was acquainted with the episode in his career connected with Dorothy Masters. He did not actually allude to it, because of the difficulty of opening up so delicate a subject. Hence it was that his abuse had overshot the mark; that it seemed to Sara to belong to that class of slanderous insinuations, in which there is nothing tangible for the accused to grapple with. A counter-irritant had been the very thing she wanted, and now she was not only angry, but all the woman in her was roused. Every hint from

Mr. Routh had been like a spark thrown into a powder-magazine. He caught the muttered words, "Cowardly, mean!" and, when he attempted to say more on the subject, she interrupted him with—

• "This is going too far. I would bear a good deal from *you*, but you are uncharitable, intolerant! You listen to false reports, and come and retail them to me, when the man who might defend himself is out of the way. You would only confirm me in my allegiance to him, if I happened to be wavering. I always stand by the Pariahs. *I* am something of a Pariah. My mother was good and pure, but didn't they scorn her? My father was an upright man; didn't they blame him for marrying her? I am my mother's true child. I remember the indignities which brought her perhaps to an early grave; and I will tell you, if you care to know it, that I long ago made up my mind I never would enter one of those spiteful families, where I might

remember how *she* had been admitted on sufferance."

It was a dangerously sudden change of front, and Mr. Routh looked at her in blank amazement. To him it was a mere girlish outbreak. But she had reminded him of her mother, and he remembered that that young mother had something tempestuous about her. Could it be possible that Sara had inherited the same stormy temperament—a temperament which had remained hidden for years, covered in by an outer crust like a central fire? He was alarmed at the violence which seemed to be convulsing her whole nature; it was more than the occasion demanded—not to be accounted for by ordinary causes. And again it occurred to him that there was probably some deeper explanation of the subtle change that had passed over her features, like a blight over a landscape.

He did not answer; but left time for her passion to exhaust itself. Then he said slowly, with a deprecating shake of the head,

"It is my duty to warn you to think properly of what you are doing. A man with expensive tastes, and debts to settle into the bargain! A man who is something of a *bon vivant*, and with whom you can have nothing in common! If I do not warn you, somebody else will. You must expect that if this marriage takes place, there will be a few people who will wonder at your choice."

"Let them!" she said bitterly. "I know we shall be well matched. Haven't I faults enough of my own to help me to make excuses? You don't know it, but I do. There's a black drop in my own heart which will always be there; a feeling which makes me almost glad to go counter to other people's opinions. Who would care about mine? Who of all the dear friends and acquaintances, who pretend to admire me, and to court my society, would remember me in a few months if I were mouldering in my grave?"

He looked at her again in utter bewilderment. The speech was so unlike her that it

took him by surprise. He did not know that it was merely the raving of her grief. He had seen Sara in almost every mood; but never as she was now, with something of the fierce light of triumph in her eyes which might have shone in Jael's eyes as she stood relentless over Sisera.

The passion was dying out. She began to excuse herself.

"You needn't sneer at my choice, if I *do* accept, as my future husband, a man who is not perfect, as I am not perfect myself," she said a little wearily. "I suppose my father did not leave you with absolute power over my destiny! I suppose I'm the most likely to understand my own taste. I must expect to be judged hardly. It is not my fault if you only prove yourself to be just like all the rest of the world."

"I don't judge you; you are mistaken," he said, trying to speak coldly. For already his severity was melting away in a feeling of shame for her. He felt a thrill of pity for her proba-

ble fate. He had believed in her grand imperial nature, in her rich capacity for loving. And now he grieved that she had fallen from the position in which he—sober matter-of-fact man as he was—had unconsciously idealized her. He had formed no such high ideal for himself, but yet he was infinitely sorry for Sara. It was intolerable to him to think that the woman whom he had worshipped,—the last thing on earth in which he had thoroughly believed,—should prove herself to be of no finer metal than others of her sex, at whose weaknesses and follies he had been accustomed to sneer. His heart ached for her with so continuous an ache that he forgot to make plans for his own future interests. He had never been so free from egotism,—so near to unselfish goodness before.

She could not help remarking his confusion ; it mollified her bitterness, for she attributed it to the delicacy of feeling which made it painful for him to interfere in so private a matter.

“Let us talk of something else,” she said,

with a gesture of genuine weariness. "Why did you stay so long away from us, Mr. Routh?"

There was silence for an interval. He could not answer. Sara's question was no sooner asked than she forgot it. In a minute she was almost oblivious of his presence; and as he continued silent she rose from her seat, and stood leaning with one arm on the marble mantelpiece. Her head was turned away from him, and her eyes were gazing blankly out of the window. Of what was she thinking? Of something far away? Would she have recked, could she have guessed it, of the desperate pain in the heart of this stern self-possessed man, to whom even in her degradation she was as the breath of his existence; this man, so cold and hard in all other relationships, who would dare death and defy torture to win a shadow of her love;—ay, to win her any way—either loving or hating?

She turned at last. He was sitting, leaning forward, his head stooped, his face hid-

den from her, mastering agony, as usual. He would have made a grand Pagan, suffering the inflictions of resistless power, and controlling sorrow by the calm, resolute determination of indomitable will.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in vague alarm; but still for a minute there was silence. Still he stooped, and his face was hidden. When he lifted it, she shrank from him—she had never seen him look like that before.

The look was one of inexpressible anguish; but she was far from guessing all that it involved.

"There is nothing the matter," he said, slowly, at last. The voice was quiet, but even she, in her self-absorption, was keen enough to detect the unnatural sound in it.

She saw that he was ill at ease, and had at once an instinctive desire to comfort him. She had gone through an intensity of suffering lately, and yet she was so constituted

by nature, that she shrank from the sight or thought of pain, to be inflicted upon herself or anything else that had life and feeling. It was all so horrible to her, so distasteful, so abnormal. Why should there be any unnecessary suffering in this weary world, if a few kind words from her might help to lessen it?

"You are ill, you are vexed," she said, coming hastily forward, speaking in her softest voice, and putting her hand with its kindest touch on his shoulder. It required another struggle to keep him from seizing the little hand, and covering it with kisses. "Don't be vexed for my sake. I was always wilful, you know," she continued, hesitatingly, trying to force her old gaiety, and to make light of the whole matter. "You must remember that you still have the whip-hand over me. You will keep your rights as my guardian for six months at least. I am sure that ought to console you. And as for the rest, there is nothing to fret about. We won't

go into mock heroics—it's no good talking as they do on the stage. I think you are very solemn and ceremonious about nothing. I am going to make a very sensible, matter-of-fact marriage, and modern nineteenth century life is very unlike a ballad or a poem."

He answered not a word. How could he tell her after this that she was preparing life-long suffering for herself, in an union which would be a sort of anticipation of Purgatory, and that he would as soon sign her death-warrant as encourage her in her mad determination. He knew she would altogether deny his right to question her as to her feelings, and that he could not press her home as to the motives which actuated her. And yet her loveless voice was horrible to him. He had seen the under side of the picture in many a domestic life during his experiences in the law; he had seen the mask torn away, and penetrated to the wrinkled skin oftener than many a clergyman

can do who is supposed to be acquainted with the private histories of his parishioners; and he knew well that these loveless marriages were the cause of much of the misery that is secretly undermining the strength and manliness of our nation. Could he tell Sara this when he had brought her up for the world?—when he had preached a sort of Comtism to her, and when his own doctrines were beginning to bear fruit?

He answered not a word, and she went on, distressed.

“So don’t worry—you really mustn’t. Haven’t I told you that I am not worth it? Besides, Ross will suit me as well as any one else; and haven’t you often spoken of the necessity for my marrying? Am I the sort of woman to be left alone in the world? Indeed I thought you would help me,” she said, with a sudden break in her voice. “Talk to Ross, if you will, and help him to be wise for the future. But do not all men sow wild oats? Dear Mr. Routh, be just——” and

the tones which had been husky sank quivering and became inaudible.

“Just!—that and nothing more.” He repeated it with emphasis—reining himself in—true even in his extremity to the habit of years. Whole histories were in that word, in the voice in which he uttered it,—in the flushed, swollen forehead which he covered again with his hand; in the bloodshot eyes and strained lips. Yet the fierce will kept dominion. His justice had been impugned, but he would trust himself to speak of it.

“Be just to yourself, Sara,” he said, very quietly. “That is all I ask. When you marry you should choose nobly—a woman gifted like you may well have the power of choosing. You may take offence if I tell you that Ross—with Maxwell is too egotistical, too narrow, too utterly selfish to care greatly for anything out of himself. If he admires you, as he probably does, it is simply the admiration of his fancy or his senses. The truth may be hard to bear; but you must face it sooner or later,

and it is better you should do so now, before you incur its disastrous consequences. *You* are the best judge of whether such a marriage will be likely to make you happy. But as your lawyer and your guardian, it is my duty to speak plainly. I suppose you are prepared to weigh your position, to look at it as it is, calmly and firmly."

He was speaking in the old, hard, dry voice, for he was fearful of touching too near to that subjective vein which he never had opened to any one, and which he could not even approach without becoming confused. He was losing his opportunity, as she had lost hers.

Sara had been beside herself, but of Lawrence Routh this could not be said. He, who had a horror of anything like a display of sentiment, and who was generally supplied with stereotyped, well turned sentences, was simply falling back upon his usual resources, to save him from floundering about in his talk.

"Indeed I am not taking offence," she answered languidly. "I can't afford to quarrel with one of my best friends. But I am tired to death of the subject. What *is* the use of discussing it, when I know my own affairs, and when nobody can help me?"

"You are right," he answered gruffly, "if you are blind to your interests, I suppose nobody *can* help you. But the day may come when you will want assistance; and when you do, you may count on mine."

She took no notice of his prophecy, but seated herself at the open piano, relapsing into weariness, impatience, and contempt. He misunderstood her silence, as he had misunderstood her speech. He had fancied he could read her as he could a book, and he began to be bewildered at the sudden turns in her behaviour.

"She is degenerating," he thought, "into that most irritating of all things, a *femme incomprise*," and he never remembered his own ignorance of the thoughts and ways of women.

"Stay," she said, "and let me play to you. I have some new music, which you must hear."

Could she think of music at such a time?—it was monstrous and unnatural.

"Just now," he answered, "I have much to do. Good-bye, Sara. Rosswith Maxwell will hear from me that the—marriage cannot take place for six months at least; and meanwhile—may I—as a personal favour, make a request that your engagement be a private one? You have no objection to this?"

"There are two or three people whom it may be necessary to tell, whom I may tell at once," answered Sara proudly; "as to the rest, I can't answer for how matters may turn out. I have no objection to do as you like. But I care nothing for Mrs. Grundy—you know that well enough."

He looked at her steadily, holding her hand, just a moment or two longer than usual. "Two or three people whom it might be necessary to tell."

A sudden thought struck him. Mr. Routh had not practised for seven-and-twenty years as a lawyer for nothing.

"By-the-by," he said, "Sara, I think you were mistaken in that idea of yours about Miss Masters. Bryan Maxwell is coming home. I hear nothing of an intended marriage, but there is a report that he has been ill."

"Ill is he?" said Sara, turning over her music, and beginning to crash a tune on the pianoforte. "People who overdo themselves are sure to be ill. But I don't think so badly of him as to disbelieve that he will marry Charley."

The music she had selected was loud dance music. And yet she was in actual physical pain. Hatred often treads on the heels of love, and she believed that she detested the very name of Bryan Maxwell.

Mr. Routh stood still, watching her grimly. Her back was turned to him, so that he could not see the twitching of the lips, nor did he notice the wincing of the shoulders. She

seemed to throw her whole soul into this ugly waltz. He did not know he could have been so irritated by the banging of the instrument, and the rattling of the notes.

"Certainly," he thought, "I have been mistaken. Perhaps, after all, I know as little about *her* nature as she knows about mine. The silk cocoon may be very different from the chrysalis which it hides. I thought her transcendental, over-sensitive, and earnest. But her feelings don't require tender handling. Any amount of sympathy which she may have for her fellow-creatures seems at present to be latent in that beautiful body." Perhaps it might be for him to elicit it, to wake the statue into life, to endeavour like a magician to develop feeling in the future.

She began singing, and he did not wait for the conclusion of the song, which was some noisy ditty of the Christy Minstrels; not at all like Sara's usual style. Was her

voice harsh and out of tune, or did it only jar upon his moral nerves? He was indignant at her cold-bloodedness; and, as he returned home, the tune which she had played and the song which she had sung kept echoing in his brain—a ceaseless din, almost hateful enough to make him loathe music for ever. He could not get rid of them, they were an incessant torment to him.

“Had it been possible,” he asked himself, “for him to have watched his ward all these years, and never to have understood her true character? Was she hard and calculating, instead of open-hearted and sweet, as he had fancied her to be? It was too soon for the blunting influences of time to have dulled all reality in her! That time which had laid its relentless fingers so cruelly on him, wrinkling his cheeks, and sprinkling his hair with white, and which had not yet succeeded in deadening the vibrations of his heart.

He would not think of it, but had recourse

to the anodyne of work; whilst Sara, who shut the piano instantly when she knew that he had gone, crept about the house, trying to attend upon Miss Armitage, with a dull half-numbing ache in her heart, of which she was scarcely conscious, so familiar had it grown to her. She struggled hard to keep it down; it was a shadowy ghostly thing, of which she was distrustful. She knew that she was suffering from bodily as well as mental prostration, and longed to hide out of sight like a wounded animal.

CHAPTER IX.

CLIENTS, who went and came from the office in Hart Street on the following day, bore away with them a conviction, more settled than ever, that Mr. Routh was just "cut out for his work," that he was a man "entirely reliable," "so keen, so cool."

Never had his tact, his insight, or his caution, been more remarkable, never had he been more energetic or ready. He told his clerks that he should have a private engagement at four o'clock, and must not be disturbed by any other application.

And duly at four o'clock Rosswith Maxwell made his appearance, easy and nonchalant as usual, in spite of everything that had happened, and was shown into Mr.

Routh's sanctum. It was a "confounded bore," he thought, "being forced to put in an appearance at all." But, after all, he "held the game hand," and nothing that this "pottering old fellow" might say would be likely to make any serious difference to his prospects. For, as he reminded himself, priding himself on his good luck, Sara Trevanion was a woman of "great force of character," and "when she had once given her word, she would be likely to hold to it."

It was pleasanter work than he had anticipated to be called upon—now that the patience of his creditors was waxing threadbare—to patch up his fortunes by making himself agreeable to a girl of this stamp. The fates were certainly in his favour. He might have chanced upon an heiress who was "wizened" or "dowdy;" he might have had to "buckle down to some frump of a woman." But he flattered himself that, in spite of a plebeian drop of blood in her veins, Miss Trevanion was so aristocratic in style, so

queenlike in appearance, as to be able to stand comparison with any of the beauties, apocryphal or real, who adorned the walls of his house. It never occurred to him to question whether these bodily characteristics might possibly be symbolical of a high-souled nature, that would not be able to bear contact with what was mean or degraded.

For he did not think himself to be mean, still less degraded. As to that little *contretemps* with Mr. Routh at Lady Vining's ball, Sara had behaved so well, and had shown herself to be a girl of such "pluck," that the matter had not been half so awkward as he had feared it might prove for him. He reminded himself complacently that the worst was over. For Rosswith made a principle of avoiding disagreeables, and determined to be on his guard, so as not to show temper in the interview which was before him. "It would be *de rigueur*, of course, that the whole of Miss Trevanion's property, or at least the greater part of it, should be set-

tled on herself. A regular martinet like Routh would be likely to insist on this old-fashioned ceremony; but Sara would be glad enough to venture a portion of her money on the preservation of the estate."

With his mind filled with these glowing anticipations, Rosswith Maxwell entered the offices in Hart Street as if he were treading on air, and tried to commence the conversation with a dexterous assumption of delicacy which he by no means possessed. But the lawyer was also showing himself in a new light; and if Rosswith was taken aback by the air of haughty indifference with which he was greeted by one whom he had been accustomed to consider as an inferior, he was still more startled at the freezing enquiry of "how long he had developed this charming talent for deception?"

"Come, come, let us be friends; there is no need for us to quarrel," said Rosswith, in a manner which was intended to be conciliatory. But there was a world of inso-

lence, to the lawyer's ears, in the self-assured contemptuous laugh.

"Would nothing," thought Lawrence Routh, "have power to check the petty pride, and the weak impertinence of this self-asserting nature? Was there no mental operation by which the eyes of a man like this could be couched from a disease which had blinded him to his own defects? Was it worth while to essay an experiment, to attempt to touch his callous heart, or to rouse him to think of anything more important than his own sensuous existence? Lawrence Routh looked steadily at the still shapely face and well-made figure of the man before him, and admitted to himself that there was nothing as yet to betray the moral crookedness within.

Ross was looking better than he had done some weeks before at "The Towers." The abstinence, which he had practised with the hope of winning Sara, had proved itself to be expedient by the alteration in his appearance. The dark marks were less appar-

ent beneath the Spanish eyes; there was a rarity of colouring about the face which would have attracted the attention of one of the old Venetian painters; and vice had abstained from branding it ostensibly with its indelible handwriting. There was no gauntness or coarseness, at present, patent to the eye. Yet, though Lawrence Routh did not know it, he himself, who had abstained from seeking pleasure, and had plodded quietly at work during the best years of his life, had about double as much vitality in him as was left in Rosswith Maxwell.

He thought as he looked at him that he would leave him to himself. The character of the man was so fixed, the armour of vanity in which he had encased himself was so impervious, that it was hopeless to expect any chance dart of his to plant itself in its joints. The *verbum sapienti* which he had intended to speak, would be thrown away here; he might as well spare his breath.

He waited till Rosswith had done laughing, and then answered coldly :

“A man may choose his own friends ; and from the time I first knew you, I never specially desired the favour of your acquaintance. It is time that you should know *me*. I care not a rap for the consequences. But first let me tell you that when you come here to discuss business, the stage tricks which might take in a school-girl are better left behind. There is nothing to swear about,” he continued coolly, as Rosswith uttered some exclamation which he quietly ignored. “I have watched your career from your boyhood. Many tales might be cited which would redound little to your credit. Miss Trevanion has a right to hear them. But it appears that matters have gone so far with this lady, that for me to bring forward these dark proofs to blacken the name on which you pride yourself, would only be to embitter her, perhaps to rouse her to the defence of your unworthiness.”

He paused, deep in thought; and his visitor, who had done swearing, sat with the flush of anger deepening on his face, tearing a piece of paper viciously into strips, and rolling the strips into pellets, unconscious of what he was doing.

He was too suddenly taken by surprise to be able to make resistance. It was a "monstrous unpleasant position for a fellow to be placed in," and he was beginning to wish that he could see himself out of it. There was something bitterly incisive in the way in which the sharp tongues of these lawyers could cut.

He felt like a criminal being arraigned at the bar, whose best hope was in silence. For no sudden eruption of speech, none of the violent attacks of passion to which he was liable, were likely to help him in this emergency. Nor would it be of any use to try vituperation; Lawrence Routh was a master of the art of repartee.

We can most of us cultivate a talent for



forgetfulness, when forgetfulness is pleasant. But there is a limit to the talent, and Rosswith suddenly recollected some papers which had been destroyed in the past, but not till Lawrence Routh had read them, since Ross had been forced to apply for legal assistance to help him out of more than one little scrape. The evidence against him had certainly been burnt, but not till every word had probably been stamped into the tenacious memory of the lawyer. These were certainly professional secrets; but a man who is dishonourable himself, does not readily credit another with the niceties of honour.

“How easy,” thought Rosswith, “would it be for Routh to avail himself of this knowledge to my detriment, to use it, for instance, by mysterious hints, without overstepping the recognised limits which bind him.”

The flush of passion faded from his face as the thought overwhelmed him, and left him white even to the lips. He leant back exhausted; the drops of moisture were stand-

ing on his brow. Everything, he remembered, was at stake. The tide was setting in against him, and he must struggle with the desperation of a drowning man.

"You talk of me as if I were going altogether to the dogs," he answered with another nervous laugh.

"I would rather you were on a safer road than you have chosen at present," answered Lawrence Routh drily. "As to the rest, we must wait and see the end. I am not given to preaching; but, if we are to talk in popular slang, when a man lets the devil get the better of him, as you have done, and invites one of his imps of wickedness into his heart, it is likely to send for others to come and keep it company."

"I don't see the point of your witticism," said Rosswith, flushing again to the roots of his hair. "I shall not stay here to be insulted in this way. I am well acquainted," he added insolently, "with the fact that men in your profession are accustomed to dwell

longer upon points of no importance, than other people may think to be at all necessary. I know there is a wonderful talent for invention in the world; but I'm not much afraid of what you can bring up about me. Miss Trevanion has too much spirit to care for any such humbug; and, if she were not above it, she has promised to be my wife. She belongs to me now."

"Humph!" said Lawrence Routh. "Compose yourself; there's no use swaggering about it."

There was silence for a minute, when, if Rosswith had noticed, he would have seen that the veins were unusually prominent on the lawyer's protuberant forehead—that the grey eyes were contracted, and the lines indurated about the mouth.

"You allude to Miss Trevanion," he said when he spoke again, "with a coolness which is sickening. But it is doubtful whether she would consider your explanations to be satisfactory! And as to a woman *belonging* to

anybody, like a piece of personal property, you seem to forget that we don't deal in slaves. Women are human beings before they are women, though marriage may be a lottery in which the best of them make mistakes. The theory of binding a wife so thoroughly to your interests as to make her ignore her own individual existence, may do very well for the majority of the sex, though even for them it is a little obsolete. But with women of Miss Trevanion's type, it would be the worst policy possible. I would advise you not to hint at it. Even if she likes you, she will be sure to prove recalcitrant."

"*Even* if she likes me," echoed Rosswith with a smile, which was intended to be ironical. "She is not the first who has liked me in spite of my 'antecedents' as you call them. I am not actually blind. And I'm more domestic than you think; so that if she were utterly indifferent at first, I shouldn't despair of *making* her like me."

"Oh, mightily, of course!" answered Lawrence Routh, rising to terminate the interview,

for he was stung beyond endurance. "As if she had not been just as civil to scores of men before you."

Rosswith did not answer, but rose as well. If there was one thing he was proud of more than another, it was of the easiness of his triumphs with the sex, and it was not gratifying to hear Sara's flirtations talked of in the plural.

"The conversation is a painful one," continued Lawrence Routh. "There is nothing to be gained by it, and we had better bring it to a close. The marriage cannot take place till my ward is of age, and during the six months which have still to elapse, there will be plenty of time to discuss the legal arrangements. I shall continue to act in Miss Trevanion's interests; but I warn *you* to choose another adviser. As far as I am concerned, I utterly disapprove of the match; and I make no secret of the fact that I shall do what I can to prevent it. But my powers are limited, and much may depend on your own behaviour. Many women are subject to infatuations of this sort; and, according to my experience, most

people make a mess of this so-called domestic happiness. But it is my duty, as Miss Trevanion's guardian, to keep her, if possible, from throwing herself and her property away. I think I have made myself sufficiently clear. There will be no occasion for us to meet as enemies in public; but the less we see of each other the better."

They parted without shaking hands; and Rosswith went out from the lawyer's room with a face some shades darker than usual, but with a gait more self-assertive, more full of bluster than it had been before.

He felt decidedly the worse for the encounter, which had been altogether of a more serious nature than the light skirmishing he had anticipated. As he went on his way he muttered,

"What cards does he hold?—the old bully. He don't show his hand—too sharp by half! But my trump-card is Sara herself, and I'm not afraid—she'll stick to me, I dare swear."

This born "gentleman" (reader, excuse the misapplication of the word) had not associated

to no purpose with gamblers and blacklegs; and perhaps the once fastidious Ross with Maxwell would hardly have been satisfied with his own modes of speech had he been suddenly introduced to his altered self.

And Lawrence Routh, who had acted on his bitter aphorism of leaving a man to "go his own road to the devil," was scarcely more satisfied with the result of his interview.

It was all misery and confusion! That a fellow who had drained himself of his resources, who had satiated himself from boyhood with every pleasure, and who was addicted to potations of stiff brandy and water, should fancy that it was sufficient to give the dregs of his life to a handsome girl supplied with a fortune, was in itself intolerable! That a successful marriage should be the terminus of such a career was sufficiently obnoxious; but the thought chafed him to agony that the cherished prize in such a case should be the coveted apple of his own desire. He decided that the case was utterly hopeless. Maxwell's nature was

so overgrown with treacherous weeds, that there was no moral rake to be used for rooting them out.

"Contemptible scoundrel!" he repeated to himself, his thoughts becoming ungovernable as they reverted to Dorothy. "As if I could lower myself by reasoning with him!"

Only the *argumentum ad hominem* remained; and there were certain offences which, if Mr. Routh had been trusted with the remodelling of our laws, he would willingly have visited with the rod.

Yet he was beginning to make excuses for Sara. Forewarned was not always forearmed with a woman, when a good-looking face and wily tongue were in question. And there was no denying that Rosswith was gifted with the attractions which are supposed to be passports to the favour of women. The consideration provoked comparison.

"My voice doesn't quaver yet," thought the lawyer, "but the grey hairs are more in number than the black. Perhaps I had better have spoken to her before! They call

me a secretive man; so much the worse. I have become so terribly the master of myself, that I can't help hiding what I feel."

It was true. His enemies could not exaggerate his reticence; he had a contempt for the man who wore his "heart upon his sleeve." But what was the consequence? Through all these weary years Sara had known nothing of the heart that was ready to "drain its life-blood" for her; and would know nothing of the canker that must now eat into that heart, nothing of the gnawing sorrow that must undermine the mainsprings of that life.

"I have no influence," he thought. "She wants to marry amongst these Maxwells—men whose type of mind has been transmitted through idle and vicious generations. She has chosen the worst of them, a fellow in whom these ancestral tendencies, these inherited proclivities centre in a climax, to say nothing of the utter mismanagement, of his childhood. And when I try to advise her, she resents my interference."

It was gall and wormwood to him to remember the years which he had passed in dreaming of this woman, spending his strength only for the wind; and to think that he should come to be no more necessary to her at last—no more essential to her comfort, than a fly that she could brush contemptuously out of her way. His calm professional advice was not even appreciated, and yet he cared for her now as he had never done before.

It was a mystery of mysteries; but one that did not daunt him. He was more than ever determined not to resign her, for he had now an object in saving her which he never had before. The waiting had been a long one, but it was not ended yet. He felt as if he could not die and leave his story unfinished.

“Sara shall be mine, she shall come to me for refuge; but now more than ever it behoves me to be cautious.”

He repeated the words, trying to shake off his melancholy, and determining no longer to

chew the cud of an exceeding bitter fancy. He foresaw all that was before her, but it should only drive her into his arms. He knew that there would be difficulties, and delicate moves in the game which he should be called upon to play. So much the better, for he was the man to play it. And, though his hand shook and his nerves might be agitated, he would abstain from handling a card that looked tempting till he had tested it. He could wait even with this, restless jealousy "sharper than a serpent's tooth" gnawing at his heart. He could wait and bear all, in spite of the festering and rankling of these wounded affections. He could wait and carry everything before him,—in time!


* * * * *

That evening at five o'clock the postman brought a letter to No —, Hart Street, which ran thus:—

" May 14th.

"DEAR SIR,

"I am in a serious difficulty, and desire your counsel and help. You know the story of Dorothy Masters, and you will not wonder that, when I heard of it, I considered myself bound in honour to do what I could to assist her. I met her elder sister at the house of your ward, Miss Trevanion; and she, Charlotte Masters, asked my aid on behalf of Dorothy. Of course I tried what little I could do. It is hard for me to have to say it, but that little availed nothing with my brother Ross; a man who could deliberately attempt to drag an unsuspecting woman through the mire of his own dishonour. A fortnight ago I heard that Dorothy, driven wild by the indignities to which she had been subjected, had suddenly left her home;—the house of her protectress in Tunbridge Wells, to go whither? No one knew. The sister was too much overcome by her grief to be able to act in this emergency. They had no friends, and no knowledge



of the world, and it only remained for me to do what I could to help them in their strait.

“I went at once to Tunbridge Wells, made enquiries at Mrs. Julian’s, and did my best to find traces of Dorothy. In vain; and I came back to Tunbridge Station the night of the 1st of May (having spent the day in useless search), and met—Charley Masters. She had left Curzon Street without reason or warning. There was some excuse for her infatuation, poor girl, for she was perfectly beside herself with agitation, and with the fear of compromising her sister by anything she might betray. Still I think she might have trusted Miss Trevanion.

“All I could make out was she felt that she, and she only, might be able to find her sister. I didn’t attempt to reason with her, for she was then in an utterly unfit state to give explanations. She was on the eve of a severe illness, as I instantly perceived. I did what I could for her; and now, to make a long story short, here is my difficulty. She is lying in a fever, in a small lodging in this town, No. —, Thames

Street, Tunbridge. Without a friend of her own sex,—nothing but a hired attendant!

“Can you, in virtue of your profession, suggest a speedy method of discovering her sister?—if she can be discovered,—or assist me in any way in rendering Charley’s position less painful? I have been down to Devonshire, whither it was believed Dorothy might be tracked. But I have come upon no clue; it all seems in vain. I shall be at my old quarters to-night, and shall be thankful if you can drop me a line to-morrow.

“Yours faithfully

“BRYAN MAXWELL.”

“Charlotte Masters is still insensible. When she comes to herself, I cannot but think she will regret the want of confidence with which she has treated her best friends. Do you think we should be justified in telling Miss Trevanion?”

Lawrence Routh laid down the letter. His face had changed frequently during its pe-

rusal. And now it darkened ominously at the words in the postscript. "Why did this 'painter fellow' harp so on Sara's name? What had *she* to do with it all, as if she could be mixed up with a wretched affair like this?"

Lawrence's heart had been full of curses against the whole race of Maxwells, when he had commenced reading this epistle. He had been inclined, at the first sight of it, to throw it in the fire. Yet its queer simplicity, its honest blundering, had disarmed him in spite of himself. He muttered more than once "Utopian—might make an episode in the pages of Cervantes;" but "sure to get him into trouble in this chattering nineteenth century."

He commenced walking up and down the room, and then stopped suddenly in his walk.

"The fact is he is not a Maxwell at all," he said. "He takes after his mother. If ever a woman was martyred in our matter-

of-fact times, because she was troubled with a conscience, that woman was his mother. I remember her dying by inches, because she was too sensitive to bear her existence. I remember her starting up with flushed cheeks because she could not sit silent and hear her husband tell lies. This son of hers takes after her, in his indifference to consequences. A piece of intemperate extravagance, this knight-errantry after damsels who had much better look after their own affairs. He'll never get through the world."

But Lawrence Routh, who, although he was not sympathetic by nature, was never the one to desert any fellow-man in a difficulty, was somewhat comforted by the consideration that Bryan was "not a Maxwell."

There was something also in the hope that this incomprehensible story might throw light on other mysteries, for he was as keen as an old fox-hound in following out a scent. There was no time to be lost; and other

business matters being ended, he started about nine o'clock for the lodgings in Fitzroy Street.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Lawrence Routh called at Fitzroy Street, he heard that Bryan Maxwell had not yet returned.

"When will he be back?" asked the lawyer, impatiently. "I thought you expected him home to-day."

"Can't say," answered the servant-maid, holding the door partially open, and peeping behind it, with a dominant idea of thieves. "Missus don't rightly know herself."

Mr. Routh went away, refusing to leave his name.

Half an hour had scarcely elapsed before a cab drove up hastily to the door, bringing the man of whom he had been in quest.

Bryan came in, tired and travel-stained, calling for refreshment in a tone of weariness which was very unusual to him. He was spent with anxiety and worry of mind, whilst his spirits had been dashed by the ill-success of his journey. A dozen new difficulties were weighing upon his mind. The recollection of Charley Masters, as he had met her at Tunbridge Station, with her eyes dilated and unnaturally bright, and an unconscious nervous working of the lips—of Charley wildly declaring that “life and death were at stake,” and that nothing should prevent her from going in search of her sister,—was not a pleasant one. Still less consolatory was the thought of the unhappy girl now lying insensible in a back street in Tunbridge, where Bryan had been forced to bribe the people to take her in.

Lawrence Routh had undervalued Bryan's common-sense. For, unworldly as the artist was, he fully saw the difficulty in which he was involved; though he told himself that

any evil consequences which might result from his chivalry were to be laid at the door of that miserable brother, who had not scrupled to add another painful episode to the family history.

"Two helpless orphan girls," thought Bryan, as he was waiting, disconsolately, for the appearance of his supper; "one of them with rumours detrimental to her character already in circulation, and Heaven knows how we are to stop these peoples' tongues; and the other in danger of her life from nervous anxiety. I wish Routh would call. I should have thought he might help me."

His spirits were not enlivened by the sight of a pile of bills which lay ready for his inspection; for his resources had dwindled since, in his search after Dorothy, he had taken the full burden of expenses upon himself. All that steam and horseflesh could do, had been called in to help him, as yet with no avail. All was misery and confusion—another proof of the desolation which must follow upon sin.

He began to collect his ideas. Could he insist upon Rosswith paying a part of the cost, for this lavish expenditure had been hard upon him just now? It was certainly inconsistent with his preconceived project of making and saving money with a view to future marriage. He began to remember this now, and to accuse himself of weakness; for he did not wish to be dependent upon his wife's fortune for success. He disdained all such stepping-stones to fame. A fortnight ago his prospects had seemed to be brightening, and he might have gone flushed with conquest to lay his spoils at Sara's feet. Was it possible that a *whole fortnight* had elapsed? Some days had been spent in the useless journey into Devonshire; but the greater part of it had been passed in anxiety at Tunbridge. He had been to Brighton and to Cheltenham, at both of which places Dorothy had acquaintances; and even now he was consulting with Mrs. Julian as to any further projects. He wondered how Sara had taken his defection. Throughout

the whole matter he had not trusted himself to write, for Charlie's piteous entreaties that he would keep her sister's secret had tied his tongue. He did not doubt Sara. "She is too noble to be suspicious," he thought; "and yet it is a painful complication. I must go to Curzon Street to-morrow morning, without loss of time. Things have gone too far between us for any paltry considerations of mine to be allowed to keep us asunder. Yet I wish I could see Mr. Routh at once."

The maid interrupted his soliloquy by bringing his supper. But he was not to be left in peace to recover from his fatigue, for, with the cold meat and stale bread, she brought, as he said to her, a "whole cart-load of letters," which had been awaiting his return. Bryan turned them over listlessly. He had not a large correspondence generally, and had troubled himself too little about his letters to have them sent after him during his late uncertain journeys. Art had been a jealous mistress to him, and like most of her worshippers, he neglected busi-

ness. He began to be amused to find that the late posts had brought him such unusually large budgets. There could be no information about the missing girl, as all the advertisements which had been risked in the hope of tracking her, had been dated, by agreement, from Mrs. Julian's house.

Bryan's face brightened as he began opening the letters.

"This looks something like work in real earnest," he thought. "Perhaps I shall make a lucrative thing of my profession after all. Sara will be pleased if I turn into a fashionable painter. I think I have a tolerable run of luck before me."

He tore the first note open.

"Dillon, of course! He can't leave a fellow alone. Well, he has proved a staunch friend of mine—even after I was obliged to break my appointment with him that day at the Exhibition. I am glad I happened to meet him as I was going to the station. I explained how I was suddenly called into the country, and he was sure to make it

all right with Sara. He wrote to me afterwards, I remember. Said Miss Trevanion was in very high spirits, or I should have been a little more anxious."

Another envelope came to hand.

"Marley too—more orders; and I have not done my Locksley Hall. Oh, here's a letter from Routh. No, it isn't. I thought perhaps he might have answered at once, though I didn't ask him to do so. More bills; they will keep. Why, what's this?"

He took up a note in delicate handwriting, a note with a crested envelope, which he recognised with a great throb at his heart, and broke the fastening,—this time with tremulous fingers.

It was dated ten days before: "May 4th, Curzon Street."

As his eyes fell upon the date, he felt his forehead growing moist. A sound, as of rushing waters, came into his ears, and all his senses became numbed with terrified anxiety. His hand shook so absurdly that he could

hardly hold the paper ; but he forced himself to read it steadily through.

“DEAR MR. MAXWELL,

“I write, by my niece’s desire, to offer you our mutual congratulations on your approaching marriage. I am sorry that your future wife should have chosen to leave Miss Trevanion’s house, her temporary home, in so abrupt and unexplained a manner. But as she had resided with us for so short a time, and had mixed so little in society, we hope that all scandal resulting from her imprudence may be easily avoided. Miss Trevanion desires me to give you her best wishes for your future welfare. Tell Charley that she forgives her, though she finds it difficult to account for the motives which could have actuated her. My niece would have rejoiced to hear of her happiness.

“Believe me,

“Yours truly,

“JANET ARMITAGE.

"P.S.—Miss Trevanion wishes me to add that, as she has made some progress in drawing, so as to be able to cultivate the art unassisted, and as she is likely to be hampered with other engagements during the season, she thinks it will be as well to discontinue the lessons. She begs your acceptance of the enclosed cheque, as some small remuneration for what you have taught her."

The enclosure of the cheque had been Sara's suggestion, just as the actual composition of the letter had been hers. She had endeavoured to write in a measured style, and prided herself on having produced a suitably polite, and, considering the circumstances, calm and temperate letter. She did not know that the words would seem cruel and cutting, or that they would read to Bryan Maxwell as if they had been written with an adamant pen and dictated by a heart of iron.

"Send him a good cheque," she had said to her Aunt. "Let me see; fifty pounds—it won't be too much. He gave me three les-

sons a week, and taught me a good deal, and Charley and he will not be rich."

Bryan dashed the cheque away from his hand, and let it fall to the ground as if it had stung him. Then he re-read the letter mechanically, receiving his death-blow in silence. There was a feeling as of hammers beating on his brain—a sense of intolerable thirst, and of not being able to comprehend what it was all about.

He left his supper untasted, groped his way into his studio, struck a light, and gazed helplessly at a picture of Sara—the last he had commenced of her, and of which he had said jokingly to himself, that it was meant to immortalize her. The end of the mahl-stick was still leaning against it, as he had left it when he had worked at it on the last day of April. Only a fortnight ago! Why had he not insisted on writing an explanation? Why had he given way to Charley's entreaties? He had supposed that Sara would think he was absent on business,—men of his guild were often sent

for suddenly. He could not have written to tell her an *untruth*; and had not Dillon assured him that everything was well?

He saw now that he had been culpably careless. Perhaps it was right that the blow should come, but surely not that it should come in this way from Sara! Why had he committed such a suicidal mistake?

"The circumstances were strong against me. I can see the possibility of any unprejudiced person having come to an adverse decision," he thought; "but she—*she* ought to have known better."

He stood looking at the picture, thinking of all the things that had been,—the dizzying charm about this woman—a charm that could not be analyzed, but which seemed to bewilder and entrance every man with whom she came in contact. A woman who could never make a clinging parasite of a wife, but who had a passionate capability of emotion. And yet, had she not got up this incredible story about him?—had she not made it an excuse

for casting him off like the dust from her feet?

Bryan was weary, but not only with travel. Before his late journey, he had been overdone with fatigue. The energy with which he had toiled had never abated, never flagged. He had forgotten the very existence of the body, but the enslaved and outraged flesh was now ready to revenge itself upon the overmastering spirit. He struggled against the temptation to think evil of Sara. He persuaded himself that he, and he alone, had been to blame. Yet the more he attempted to unravel it, the more the riddle eluded him. There is no mental anæsthetic for a case like this, and these crashes in the soul are apt to raise clouds of bewildering dust, analogous to those occasioned by the fall of buildings in the material world.

Bryan seated himself at a table which stood close to his easel. And there he sat motionless—almost unconscious; for thought had merged into a blank, and he was scarcely aware that he was fighting a duel with mortal agony, and defying the grief which threat-

ened to overwhelm him. He sat with his arms spread out on the table, and the open letter resting on his arms.

Eleven o'clock came—twelve o'clock! The house was unusually quiet, and good-natured Mrs. Ludlow, the landlady, began to grow alarmed. Not but what she was used to her lodger's late hours, which she attributed to the general eccentricity of painters, and considered to be in keeping with the tenor of his arrangements, inclusive of "them nasty smells" and the "mad-looking models," who offended her ideas of neatness and propriety. But on this occasion her kind heart had been made anxious by the maid's account of Mr. Maxwell's paleness, and, with the excuse of desiring information on some point of domestic economy, Mrs. Ludlow tapped at the door of the sitting-room. There was no answer—not even the sound of a footstep. She made her way into the apartment, and discovered not only that her lodger was absent, but that he had not taken "so much as a glass of beer,

to say nothing of a mouthful of meat," and that a chaos of papers was left littering about, open for the inspection of anyone who might choose to read them.

The natural consequence of all this was that, after twelve o'clock, Mrs. Ludlow boldly ventured into Bryan's studio, where he was still sitting, resting his head upon his hand, and holding a handkerchief to his face, with the letter spread before him, and his eyes fixed upon it with the long look with which he might have regarded the corpse of one whom he had most loved on earth. But it was the unaccountable expression of those large, soul-earnest eyes—which constituted the single strictly handsome feature in the face of this man—that terrified Mrs. Ludlow, who could not believe in the existence of spiritual agony without associating it with mere bodily torture.

Forgetting all her ideas of propriety, she made a dart at her lodger, as if she would take him under her motherly protection.

"Sir—oh! Mr. Maxwell—again! Not that

again, sir! Let me send for the doctor. Mr. Lynton would come directly."

"My dear Mrs. Ludlow," answered Bryan, in a husky voice, rousing himself with a bewildered look; then crumpling up the letter and hiding it in his pocket; whilst he tossed the blood-stained handkerchief into a corner out of sight. "Don't distress yourself about nothing. I assure you I'm all right." Then he added, with a faint smile, "Well, what did you want with me?"

"Oh! sir, you are too careless; don't, don't trifle with it so! Indeed, sir, forgive my liberty," she added, putting up her apron to her eyes, "but I know all about these things. My poor dear sister began exactly in the same way, and—and she——"

"Hush!" said Bryan, kindly; "I will take care, I promise you. My life is a pretty good one. My mother had the same tendency, and I take after her in everything; but she did not die of consumption."

"But, sir, Mr. Lynton——"

"I don't believe in homœopathy. Let him have his own pet theories! They will do for nervous cases, where the mind is more affected than the body. Cases which, if you leave them alone, will get well without doctoring." And he smiled a peculiar smile, which again puzzled Mrs. Ludlow.

"I don't deify mere strength," he continued, with the same smile; baring an arm which for muscular development might have served for one of his own models; "but you must admit that I am no skeleton, and that I have plenty of muscle left. My dear Mrs. Ludlow, just think of it. Do I look as if I require nursing, and kind solicitude from women, a great fellow of six feet high, who could take you up and carry you, as soon as look at you? Don't you see the absurdity? I advise you to go to bed, or we shall have to turn the tables, and I shall come and nurse *you*."

And, having dismissed her with this speech, his eyes wandered away from her with the same dreamy, absorbed look which they some-


times wore when he was wrapt in the conception of some difficult subject for his art, some subject it might be of infinite pain.

Mrs. Ludlow crept away, with her kind heart sorely troubled. She could not rid herself of her anxiety, in spite of Bryan's joking tone. It had not escaped her observation that his face had an ashen look, and that one of his hands had been clutching nervously at the corner of the table.

"Did you ever see anybody look like that before?" she whispered to the maid-of-all-work who had followed her on tip-toe, and was peeping through the door.

"No, never," answered the girl, whose distended eyes had been fixed on the lodger, who was "every hinch a gentleman, hartis though he was; and who had never given her so much as a sharp word all the time she had done for him," with a gaze of terror and dismay.

"He's too good for this world," said the landlady, as she went slowly back to her room,



"and that's just all about it. I don't mean that he's one of your canting sort, always preach preach about what you ought and oughtn't to do, just as if God Almighty sent 'em messages to keep them goin' in the affairs of all the other folk. But he's right down good, he don't never talk nothink about it, but he just *does*—that's where it is. And now he's going to die, you mark my words. Just when we had the winders pulled about to please him. Not that I grudge him anything, the poor dear soul! Never a better stepped, or a nicer spoken gentleman. Oh my——!"

Mrs. Ludlow would have said "Oh my!" many times over, could she have seen the interior of the studio where Bryan spent the night. After she had gone he yielded to a sudden impulse, and began putting careful touches to the unfinished picture on the easel. Then, when the sensation of faintness returned, he threw open the window, and tried to inhale the breeze from without. He was

scarcely aware of the lateness of the hour, and had no intention of committing suicide in one way or another, but, with the air comparatively cold on his delicate chest, he sat with his arms folded on the window-sill, and his eyes fixed on the blue blank space, for the greater portion of the short May night. Of what was he thinking? Of nothing!—of everything!—of the incomprehensible! His mind seemed to be devastated by invading ideas—ideas foreign to his own nature. They came like strange hordes without rule or natural law, as he sat in that hopeless attitude during the silent miserable hours of the night.

It was useless to lie down. He knew he could not sleep; for, when he closed his eyes, the storm of conflicting emotions which assailed him did not abate in its fury for an instant. And yet, as the hours went on, he began to feel as he had felt earlier in the evening, as if his brain were reeling; as if in a short time stupor must succeed to

thought. And the night air, which had seemed at first to subdue the fever in his veins, was beginning to make him icily cold. He was shivering as in mid-winter.

He shut the window and took his place again in the chair, remarking for the first time that he had let his candle burn out, and that there were no matches at hand to enable him to relight it.

All was darkness in the studio, except for a solitary gleam of moonlight, which fell upon the lay figure on the dais, dressed in a queer combination of Spanish hat and Roman toga; somebody must have stuck the hat on during his absence. Then there were creaking noises in the silent room, noises from inanimate objects such as we are all familiar with during the lonely hours of the night. And even the cat, which had lain at Bryan's feet, purring obstreperously, and looking as if intent to pass the time gazing up at his face, had at last deserted him. To be alone, with the constant

presence of an all-tormenting idea, seemed to be synonymous with the worst form of death. The empty darkness jarred on the solitary man. The room, with its associations, became intolerable to him, and he groped his way into the passage.

Once there he became conscious that his nerves were horribly excited. There was a sort of thrill, a vibration of his whole frame, premonitory of some unusual phenomenon. He thought he heard footsteps on the stairs; he felt as if something were approaching him from behind. Then a woman's hand seemed to be placed on his shoulder, a soft pleading hand, with a touch which was familiar. He looked sharply back into the solitude and darkness; for the shutters were firmly closed, and no moonbeams were allowed to penetrate into the passage. As he looked he could have sworn that he heard a cry—a cry with which he was familiar as he had been with the touch—calling upon him by name. He was bathed in perspiration, for the voice

had been so real that he was awestruck and overcome. It was true that his brain must have been exhausted with thinking, for he could not recall when or where he had heard that cry before. Then a sudden rush of memory brought back the sound of his mother's sob, and all the circumstances in a scene enacted years ago, when he had been a helpless child, and when his father had struck him furiously in one of his fits of ungovernable rage.

"Mother," he said instinctively, stretching out his hands, and looking up and down the stairs in eager enquiry.

But the sound had died away. All was absolutely still, except the beating of his heart and the rattling of a window as the breeze drove against it.

"Mother!" he said again, and then suddenly remembered that she on whom he called was lying cold and senseless in the vault of Stapleton church, whither they had carried her remains ten years before. He had for-

gotten the fact in the vehemence of his search.

"What has come to me?" he asked, putting his hand to his head. "I am hypochondriacal and wretched. I must shake off these fancies."

He was apprehensive of his own weakness ; for some non-scientific men, with the smattering of a little knowledge, are rather apt to exaggerate than to undervalue the possibility of being fooled by the deception of their senses. He feared to become the sport of the delusive tricks which his exhausted system might play him in the darkness, and threw the shutters open wide to relieve him from the sense of desolation. As he did so he fancied he heard himself called again. But he did not look round ; he began to understand that the sound had emanated from the tumult of his own soul.

The effort of movement had already aroused him, not from his sleeping, but his waking

dreams. He remembered that it was all real, that things could never be the same again, and wished that he had never seen Sara Trevanion—never found her so beautiful, so fatally gifted. But the remembrance of his mother had calmed him already. The void of separation would be lessened in time; and, though at present he felt sick and sad at the failure of his hopes, he knew that the thought of God would return and comfort him soon.

“It is all over,” he thought, with an attempt at stoical philosophy. “It is something to have tasted the very worst that life can bring me. Nothing else that can happen can hurt me much now. Now at last I can defy the world, because I have nothing that it can take away.”

And the morning came, as all mornings come, with a grand impartiality to happiness or sorrow. The first red streaks appeared in the London sky; the first grey light,

dim and sinister-looking, crept into the passage; and the rolling of carriages, accompanied by the occasional chirpings of sparrows, recommenced in the streets.

Bryan hastened to his bedroom to bathe his face with cold water, and scour it vigorously with a towel, to destroy, if he could, the outward signs of his vigil. His features looked blue and strange to him in the early light, and the scantily-furnished bedroom seemed a miserable den.

"A sort of Walpurgis night," he muttered to himself. "I shouldn't like to pass such another again. I must get new apartments, where nothing will remind me of the past."

He determined to be very careful of appearances, for sympathy would have been terrible to him, and he shrank with sensitive horror from Mrs. Ludlow's curiosity. So dressing himself more scrupulously than usual, he waited for the pretence of an early breakfast, and then went out, about ten o'clock, as he said, "on business."

CHAPTER XI.

BRYAN opened the door on the bright May morning with shaking limbs and trembling hands, feeling as if years had been taken from his life. He walked on steadily, trying to lose himself in a thoroughfare, crowded with bustling, energetic people, bent on business or pleasure. He felt as if here, where humanity was beating with its strongest pulses, where the tide of outward life was surging around him, he might merge his own identity in the existence of others.

He wished to regain full command over his nerves, that he might quit himself like a man in the task that was before him. But he began to agree with Mrs. Ludlow; he was

certainly out of sorts. His brain must have been distempered, for the sound of the noisy city had a dismal undertone in it—a minor wail of misery—the wail which is in all creation, the groaning of its travail.

He remembered that one of the last suggestions, which had been made by practical Mrs. Julian, was that poor little Dorothy might have hidden herself in London, and he thought how hopeless it would be to look for a trace of her in this vast wilderness of beings. Latterly Bryan had been reading the police reports, as a matter of duty. He had read them with a repugnance which it was impossible to overcome; and with an undefined dread that he might come upon some tragedy of a kind which he dared not admit to himself, though he was certain that its probability had occurred to Mrs. Julian.

Things were not after all so black as they might have been, for the crisis of Charley's fever was passed. News to that effect had been brought to him by the post, and he de-

terminated to put unnecessary misgivings out of his mind, as he walked on in the direction of Curzon Street.

After a time the effect of the exercise, and the reviving influence of the fresh Spring air, began to tell favourably upon his nervous system. The filmy shadow passed away from his eyes. His whole physique became expressive of some strong purpose. His hands shook no longer, his footsteps were firm. He had regained his usual self-possession, and thanked Heaven that he could be calm even with the calmness of despair.

He was still walking at such a rapid pace that, close to the well-known doorstep, he came into collision with a man who was hastening in the opposite direction, nearly knocking him over. Bryan bowed without looking, but with a haughty formality of apology which was altogether new to him; and was still striding on, when he felt his arm suddenly griped, and turned unwillingly.

"Routh!" he exclaimed.

"Maxwell, my good fellow!—that *you*? This is lucky—you're just the man I wanted to see. Called at your place last night, and you weren't in. Can you walk this way with me, or are you——?"

"You are pressed for time, I suppose, as usual?— Yes, I can go your way," said Bryan, uncomfortably conscious that his lips were parched, and that he was obliged to make an effort to speak before the words would come.

"Don Quixote looks comical," thought Lawrence Routh as they turned back together. Then, as his custom was, he began business forthwith, plunging at once *in medias res*, suggesting means, asking questions, and bringing his clear head to a full consideration of the difficulty.

"You see, my dear boy," he said, "I'm too old a stager to go gallivanting over the world after damsels in distress. Quite melodramatic, really; but perhaps I'm of opin-

ion that it might have been better for all parties had you been a trifle less romantic, and left the young lady to fight her own battles."

Bryan glanced at him, and saw what he interpreted to be a smile of satirical disgust at his stupendous greenness. It was only a humorous look which flickered over the strongly marked face, and lingered for a moment round the keen lips. But Bryan could not help wincing at this expression of opinion from a man of the world.

Lawrence Routh continued—resolutely ignoring the 'look of wounded pride which blazed up in the artist's eyes:—

"You ought at least to have left some message at your lodgings, explaining the cause of your absence. You can't afford to be so indifferent to the opinion of others, but——"

"Stop a minute!" said Bryan, gulping down the feeling of indignation, and confessing in his heart that the shrewd lawyer was in the right of it. "You know the world better than

I do. I—I have always been a bit of a hermit—and we artists——” He waited, pressed his hand to his side, after a habit he had, and coughed a hacking cough. “We artists are a queer set; we live with our own fancies, and we get a little mad—some of us——” He waited again, and continued with an attempt at a smile. “I thought when this morning came, that *I* had been a little light-headed last night, or had some strange impossible dream. But you shall be my father confessor. Suppose a fellow makes a mistake, does a foolish thing without sufficient premeditation. Can he let another, and a weaker one than himself, suffer through his mistake ever so slightly, and yet keep his own honour unsullied?”

Lawrence Routh kept a minute's silence. By what strange instinct did the feeling that at last he had come upon the clue to the involved lives of the actors in this story,—this story which so nearly concerned his own interests,—suddenly flash across his mind, stunning him momentarily not only with its novel-

ty, but with the pain of certainty ? The furtive steel-grey eyes gleamed with something like hatred at the face of this man by his side. But only for a second. Had the man happened to be his prosperous rival, he doubted if even then it would have been possible for him to detest him with an abhorrence which would have suited the intensity of his nature. But, as it was, would it not be a waste of material ?

The morning sunlight was falling on Bryan's face,—that face so strangely different to all the hurrying crowd of mortals in the busy street. The silky, fair moustache could not entirely hide the weary look of depression round the white, feverish lips. The cheeks were wan and colourless, and the eyes, which were somewhat too large, as if they had overworn the face, were constantly wandering, as if in search of something, "Over-work—over-anxiety—sudden disappointment !" thought the lawyer, with his usual keenness. The spirit was wearing holes in the tabernacle of flesh. Yet of the pettiness, the acquisitiveness,

the unrest of the other faces, this face had none. Lawrence Routh knew it. For he was, as I have already said, something of a physiognomist, priding himself on his leaning to materialism. He made a strange jumble of the teaching of Spurzheim and Gall, and yet in some ways he was wiser than many a Christian philosopher—poor old cynic that he was; rejecting the thing itself, and yet grasping at the unrecognised Christianity in Cobbett and St. Simon. He believed, as firmly as Bryan Maxwell did, in the existence of certain moral principles—the very breath of life and health—which human law would be powerless to enforce, and which the attempt to systematise by legislature would probably deprive of their highest virtue, and possibly eliminate from the social atmosphere.

Bryan's scruples were not ridiculous to him. He remembered the time when the nicest point of honour had been to him as the apple of his eye. He had outlived that scrupulous phase himself, and yet he could appreciate the immense and

purifying power of springs of action in the heart.

Bryan waited for his answer. Then, supposing that the matter needed further explanation, he continued, "I'm on the horns of a dilemma—can't you help me? On the one hand there may be mischief in idly allowing circumstances to take their course, on the other——"

He looked up, and suddenly detected the ripple of change which had passed over Lawrence Routh's usually impassive features; and the evanescent light, like an electric spark in the darkness, which was unconsciously emitted from the generally cold eyes.

Bryan stopped abruptly, conscious that an accident had suddenly broken up the surface, between the speakers, altering the relations between them, and that that strange sort of spiritual communication in which the secret thoughts of one soul are revealed to another—a phenomenon which a few of us may have experienced once or twice in a life-time—had taken place. Bryan knew that he had no

further need to explain himself in speech ; and Lawrence Routh was equally aware that the artist had discovered his secret, and that he could not evade the fact of such discovery, however he might be inclined to ignore or resent it.

“I should say,” he began coldly and unsparingly, “that a man must suffer the penalty of his own mistake. It is hard when that penalty must result from rashness. But rash philanthropy is always bad. I’ve been used to see the failure of a good many specifics for effecting good in this world. In early life I had pet theories like yours, but now I am getting used to the ways of mankind. I let things take their course, which you will find to answer better another time. But supposing you to have involved yourself by a blunder in the past, I am afraid you must be prepared to abide by the consequences of it.”

There was a dead silence. The words had been intended to sting, but the hearer was scarcely conscious of the condescending compassion in them, which would have wounded

him had he been less pre-occupied. The two men walked on rapidly, threading their way in and out, in and out, unnoticed in the jostling throng. For they were again in one of the more crowded thoroughfares; and Bryan Maxwell knew, to the hour of his death, just how the street looked in the brilliant May sunshine, with the houses clearcut against the sky, casting well-defined shadows; just how the shops were decked with gay jewelry and dresses, and how the clocks sounded as they gave the quarter-hour.

"I think you must be right," he said, very slowly at last. That was all; and there was such an awful calmness about the words, that Lawrence Routh felt a measure of pity.

"Do you know," he said abruptly, "that your brother is going to be married?"

"Married!" answered Bryan, with a start so violent that a passer-by stopped involuntarily; "no—what can you mean?"

"Have you any objection?" asked Lawrence, sharply, involuntarily turning another screw of the rack.

"What right have I to object?" he answered, drawing his breath hard; "you would not care to have my ideas on the subject—you would call them fantastic. Excuse me, I must decline to discuss my brother's affairs."

The lawyer felt himself growing red. He was not accustomed to be answered in this fashion, just too when he was "giving the fellow a last chance to right himself." Perhaps it was this feeling of irritation which made him cruel, and the lash of the stinging scourge fell again.

"Miss Trevanion has not told you then? I can't see why I fancied that she would. You were great friends, I hear—gave her lessons in painting. What do you think?—is she clever?"

"I don't follow you," muttered Bryan, through lips which were white with anger. "Pardon me—Miss Trevanion——"

"Intends to marry your brother Rosswith."

"Good God!"

The sacred name was not uttered profanely—not after the manner of an oath. Rather it

so escaped from Bryan's lips, in accents penetrating and thrilling, as if he had forgotten the presence of any human listener, that the man who heard it shrank involuntarily from intruding on an agony which he was not intended to witness. But he recoiled as voluntarily from his nobler instinct, and went on with a cynical bitterness, which he did not often permit in himself—he who had the mask ever up.

“I used to believe in you, Bryan Maxwell, as a man who, at any rate, attempted to act out the somewhat impracticable doctrines of a romantic creed; though certainly, if Rochefoucauld is to be believed, I was a fool to expect a miracle amongst men I suppose it is true that the hero never existed who could honestly rejoice in the good-luck of his friends. Certainly I was never yet called upon to serve an indictment for the offence of not loving one's neighbour better than oneself. Still, in the case of your own brother—if he thinks seriously of amendment, and if Miss Trevanion brings the

wealth whilst he has the position, surely you need not grudge him his last chance. The match will be a good one—you can't deny that."

Bryan did not answer the reckless badinage. A sort of film seemed to be forming again before his eyes, and he was conscious of a feeling of bodily lassitude, the result of physical as well as of mental suffering. A positive shiver ran through his tall frame. And Lawrence Routh, who, like Carlyle, worshipped strength for its own sake, and despised the "weakly amiable theory" of deluded theologians who looked upon pain as a punishment or a mistake, was aware of a superiority which steeled his heart against him. Any betrayal of emotion was despicable to him.

"Ay, he has position," he continued, "and a family estate, and Sara has plenty of money to settle his debts; a very suitable match, taking the world as it goes. Perhaps not according to our tastes—yours and mine—we are fastidious. For my part, I don't pretend to know much about a future existence,

but either there is another life in which we shall remember each other, or there isn't. And, supposing this to be the only one, if one marries at all, it is worth while to choose a sympathetic companion, if it be only to see if such a thing as happiness can exist."

Bryan was still silent. They turned into a side street as Lawrence Routh added,

"You don't ask after Dorothy. Where is your chivalry? Oh, by-the-by, I had forgotten, she is not to be found—it was you who told me that. But, if she were, it would be much the same; Sara thinks little of such small peccadilloes. A feather in Ross's cap, to have won the love of that pretty innocent creature, and then throw her over for the heiress—eh?"

"Do I understand you?" interrupted Bryan, almost spelling out his words with a laboured enunciation. "Do you say that—Miss Trevanion will marry Rosswith, knowing what he is—knowing that he cruelly deserts another

woman, to whom he was pledged in honour—you say this?"

"I say it most certainly; these things happen every day. It won't do for you or me to pull a long face because our friends follow the fashion like sheep after sheep. I ought to say nothing about it—it's a private affair—no business of mine; and hearts are not so brittle as most people think."

"For God's sake stop, or you will break *my* heart," said Bryan, in a hoarse whisper.

The entreaty was wrung from him in his extremity, like a cry from a victim stretched upon a rack. Routh began to feel remorse for what he had done, when he noticed for the first time the quick gasping of the breath, and the drops of moisture which stood upon his forehead. Could it be possible that this boy's passion could be compared with his own?—could the shallow of the rapid river be matched with the silent depths of the unruffled ocean?

He put the idea away from him in scorn,

and yet he felt ashamed of himself when Bryan, grasping him with a convulsive pressure of his hand, muttered—

“Routh, I forgive you. It was not your better nature, but your outraged self which was speaking. There are people who say that you consider yourself above all feeling. But I know better,—you choose to be misunderstood.”

It was useless to argue the question, for Bryan did not wait; and Lawrence’s eyes followed after him as he strode away, looking strangely straight and rigid as he turned the corner of the street.

The lawyer was conscious of a fresh access of pity and remorse—an unusual experience for him! For, though he heard numerous tales of acute mental suffering in the course of his professional experience, he never allowed these stories to have a depressing influence on his spirits. Yet he had sufficient sensibility to appreciate what was morally great. His was not a low-toned nature, though he had accus-

tomed himself to over-estimate mere brute force, and had allowed himself to be hemmed in by what he considered to be the inevitable force of circumstances. He recognised no worship but that of the silent sort before the mysteries of the Unknown, and yet he was by no means inclined to sneer at the appeal to a higher power which had been forced from Bryan in his agony.

The young artist was a study to him—an interesting phenomenon. “Over-sensitive, over-punctilious,” he thought, as he went back to Hart Street. “At any rate, *he* is perfectly safe not to stir further in this matter. It’s hardly a fair mode of warfare to open fire in full battery on these thin-skinned men. But then there is the law of self-protection. After all, it will not amount to interference with him—not, at any rate, for long, for I doubt if any insurance office would take his life. Perhaps he might live as long as any of us, if he would give himself a chance. But he champs himself to death like a high-blooded horse the first

time he feels the bit. Enthusiasts like this are sure to be killed off, after a few years, by the mere discovery of the world's littlenesses. Eheu! my policy answered with him! Going straight to Curzon Street, was he?—I shouldn't like to have to do it over again."

CHAPTER XII.

AS Bryan went home, avoiding the broader thoroughfares, and choosing the back streets, he felt as if he were losing his footing; as if the solid earth were giving way beneath him. Nothing is more difficult than to go through the process of disillusion without hardening into cynicism.

Bryan had set out that morning believing implicitly in Sara's womanly goodness. Not an unconscious reproach, not a light thought of her had occurred to him hitherto, even in the depths of his suffering. She had acted hastily, severely, it might be; she had given him encouragement, and then dismissed him from her presence. But he had begun to see

how it was possible for her to feel as if he had insulted her. A sudden glimpse of self-revelation had made him smile sadly at his former mistakes. He had been ready with his explanation; ready even to hope that if, in his ignorance of the customs of society, he had seemed to her to err beyond forgiveness, so as to make reconciliation impossible in this life, it might yet please God to sanctify their separate existences, and to teach him to merge his smaller interests in his Creator's higher and more comprehensive will.

He had not, of course, expected from a woman of Sara's cast of mind that sort of canine fidelity which has become so obnoxious to our modern ideas. Yet, when in his passage through narrow streets and alleys, he encountered worn, degraded-looking faces—the faces of men and women, who after years of contemptible shifts, and all the narrow monotony of grinding poverty, could still retain some spark of divinity, because they

had been faithful to each other,—he thought bitterly of other women clothed in fine linen and purple. Women who, in spite of the rich gifts that were showered upon them, only acted so as to make this world's riddle more inexplicable—the insoluble riddle of evil and sorrow.

He tried to keep back the doubts which flitted bat-like across his mind, and was ashamed of himself because the lawyer's taunts kept re-echoing in his ears. The taunts were not new to him. For Bryan had been brought in contact with fellow-men who had not been accustomed to touch difficulties gently with kid-gloved hands, but who had attempted to pierce to the very roots of the deepest matters. Not only had he been educated in an age that had studied Huxley, and been brought face to face with Baur and Strauss, but he had not been able to shrink from facing the deepest questions—moral as well as intellectual. There was a genuineness and thoroughness about this man, very different from the shallowness of many

an untried religionist. He could meet doubt in most cases ready-armed. And yet the sad consciousness of the limitations which surround all efforts at finite knowledge, and the impossibility of reaching the impenetrable, which is common to the highest human nature, was for ever assailing a mind like Bryan Maxwell's; and perhaps his habit of attributing all human events to another and greater volition than his own, made it difficult for him in this dark hour to understand the meaning of his present reverse. In the midst of the miserable consciousness of his own inability to recover his former tone of mind, or to retrieve that which he had irrecoverably lost, the horrible suggestion recurred to him—had he indeed acted according to the maxims of an obsolete system, which the shrewd man of the world treated as dead and exploded? Had he starved himself on an outworn creed? The sea of faith was ebbing around him; he seemed to hear its retreating moan,

“ . . . down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.”

“A temptation from my own weakness,” he thought, quickening his footsteps. “In missyish men who have formed their opinions lightly, baffled tenderness *may* be an incentive to scepticism—but I—Heaven knows I have thought about mine. Am I made of such feeble stuff, am I so utterly contemptible that a mere accident like this should be able to set those opinions which are made of the ‘stuff o’ the conscience’ veering from the mark?”

He reached his lodgings and went immediately into his studio—that studio which claimed to be called a haunted chamber, from the thousands of visions which had appeared to him in it. The happy sunshine came streaming merrily into the room over pictures, and busts, lay figures, and masses of drapery; over books, carved oak furniture, and a little of everything. For since Bryan had become acquainted with Sara Trevanion, and had admired the taste with which she arranged

her apartments, he had expended a portion of his savings on the decoration of this room.

And here the solitary man, whose keenly appreciative and impressionable nature, whose fastidious exactitude and stainless life were so anomalous in the eyes of a large majority of his gregarious brother artists,—the man who held so strongly to the exploded theory that love is a sacred thing, sat, gathering his face into his hands, and trying to shut out from his own mind the wreck of his faith in the only woman he had ever loved.

He admitted to himself that it was better to know the facts—that truth, however stern, is preferable to self-deception. Yet the whole thing was incomprehensible to *him*, who had often been called “eccentric” because he had resisted conformity to any custom which was not scrupulously exact, and who would rather have died than commit an action which could cast a shadow on his honour.

Yesterday he would have been incredulous, if any one could have told him that it would

be possible for him to feel an aggravation of his pain. Yet the torture of to-day transcended that of yesterday. Just as the actual canterbury is more excruciating to bear than the throbbing of wounded flesh.

Bryan's cure was to be effectual, yet at present it seemed as if it were to bring annihilation. He felt like a man in a stranded ship, of which the timbers were going to pieces, settled to bear his fate, yet stunned and half unconscious.

For there is one thing worse to look upon than the corpse of a dead love, and that is the corpse of a dead faith. It was the "bitterness of death" to a man like Bryan Maxwell to have his eyes suddenly opened to the utter unworthiness of one in whom he had believed. He was weak only so far as oversensitiveness is weak. He was more than usually brave in all other respects, with great powers of endurance. Yet he could have stood by any grave with more resignation than by this.

It seemed to him now that it would have been an easy thing to have foregone this woman's love, could he but have kept his trust in her goodness. He could have taken his death-warrant, if need be, from her lips, as he had prepared himself to take it only that morning. But this woman had never existed at all, as he believed in her.

His passion seemed to have fled from him; the scales had fallen from his eyes. He had made an egregious blunder, by falling into the common mistake that beauty and nobility of soul must necessarily be associated. From the moment that Lawrence Routh had told him that Sara had deliberately consented to marry his brother Rosswith—knowing Rosswith's previous history—his love had dropped down a dead thing by his side, contaminated in the dust, and never to be quickened anew. For to love in a nature like his was to esteem. He might pity, for he was generous; but in his cruel pangs of shame for a woman's degradation he never deceived him-

self for a moment. The shrine was abandoned, the eidolon gone. There is nothing so grievous as this dethroning of a cherished image. To see it cast down and defiled, to lay one's hand on the crown of a life, and to find the word Ichabod written on that crown.

The little clock tick-ticked on the mantelpiece, and inexorable Time went on beating out the little lives of men, with his grim indifference to possible heart-throbs. And Bryan Maxwell passed through the great ordeal of his life. His part was clear. He would see Sara no more. She was bound to his brother ; he must leave her alone. He listened to the mechanical ticking of the clock, and began to think of the vast multitudes who had passed through trials as great, with frenzied heads and broken hearts, and who were perhaps even now being summoned to their rest, and of the numbers who were being called at that moment to traverse the same little journey of life which so few would willingly live over again.

"I have known the worst of sorrows," he repeated; "nothing new can come to me now. It will take the rain of years to wash away the stains of it. And yet I must master it."

The fibres of its deep-set roots might be ineradicable, but henceforward they should be covered in, and kept out of sight. The pain was still tightening round his heart-strings. Yet it was to be conquered; it would not last for ever. It might be deadened in time, trampled out by other suffering or obliterated by work.

The sunshine had come and gone, the shadows were growing longer, when Bryan, worn and haggard, with a pale transfigured face, drew ink and paper towards him, and began to write thus:—

"DEAR MADAM,

"I received your note and the enclosure, for which I thank you; though, as the amount is too large, I must beg leave to

return it to you. It is due to myself and the lady whom you mention to tell you that you are labouring under some strange mistake. Miss Masters left your house from no unworthy motive. Perhaps it would have been better had she been able to explain her reasons; but she was not in a fit state of health at the time to reason clearly about anything. She left in great distress of mind to seek her sister, and she is now seriously ill. Should she recover, I will make known your good wishes to her. But I cannot tell you when, or whether at all, Miss Masters will become my wife, because I can hardly believe she will accept the hand of one so unworthy as

“BRYAN MAXWELL.”

He folded the letter and put the cheque in it, enclosing with it an account, with half a guinea charged for each of the lessons he had given to Sara. He would not soften the blow in any way to himself; for he told himself that he had been simply her drawing-

master. And, though he would not endure the humiliation of receiving over-payment as a salve for a spirit-sore, still, the nearer the affair was reduced to a simple business transaction, the better it would be for both of them.

Bryan's eye fell, as he finished the letter, on the picture which was standing still unfinished on the easel. Such a face as it was! He looked at it with the long last gaze with which we see the confined dead. A face which seemed to be as good as it was beautiful; now to be covered up and put out of sight. It was strange and anomalous to be called upon to close a page in the book of memory, which he had hoped might still be open to him, that he might feast upon it occasionally; and to find that it was not only blotted and dimmed, but to be hidden from him for ever.

And if it is hard to bear the sober truth, when it strips away the draperies with which imagination has invested a beloved object, it is harder still to be forced to return to the

old narrow groove of apparently unprofitable and even self-seeking work.

Bryan's ambition had been swept away with his love; yet he held firmly, like a drowning man, to the last plank that was left him. He clung to the theory that no trouble should be insurmountable. It seemed to him that to desert this theory in the hour of his trial would be not only to give proof of the feebleness of his nature, but would be like infidelity to the ideal of his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT would have been difficult to discover a flaw in Bryan's philosophy during this crisis of his life.


"It would be cowardly and contemptible," he argued, "for a man to lose his confidence in the goodness of Heaven, or to allow his energies to become paralyzed, because a woman had been created beautiful, and was not destined for his enjoyment." "If God's kindness in this life were to be apparently in reserve, there remained," as he reminded himself, "the practice of pure unselfishness, the rising upwards in moral life. The darkness was only apparent, it could not prevent the light." "Should a reasonable being," he asked, "mar the usefulness of his career with self-

ish whinings after happiness, when he should struggle to do his duty—to tune his life again harmoniously, and set it properly in order.”

We are all of us familiar with this style of thought, so satisfactory in theory, but so difficult to put in practice, when the physical machinery may be out of working trim, or working in a sluggish way for want of winding up. We forget that the will cannot be properly exercised without a fit material organism—a sound apparatus of brain substance to enable it to carry out its purposes.

Bryan despised himself because, though his misplaced, calamitous love had disappeared, the baneful effects of the potion were still working in his system. The flesh had closed over the wounds, but they bled still inwardly. His heart was heavy as lead, beating in a muffled way; whilst there was a numbing influence over his faculties of which he was cruelly ashamed.

The first symptom of utter “breakdown” in



health came in a very usual form. He began to wake at nights with a nameless horror seizing him. He would turn on his pillow, endeavour to wrestle with his weakness, and to cast away from him the bitter memories which continued to assail him; and in the morning he would rise with strained eyes and aching bones to wage the old fruitless battle of the flesh against the spirit.

It would not do; outraged nature was ready to resent the indignity. Bryan never once swerved from the line of conduct which he had marked out for himself, and a part of his *rôle* was to execute the orders which he had received for slight pictures or sketches from various connoisseurs. These had seemed to be wonderfully easy in contemplation. But his brush wandered languidly amongst the colours, making false touches, of which he was painfully aware. The tints would not blend—the outlines would not flow. Occasionally he made frantic efforts to struggle with his medium, and did his best to over-

come his awkward manipulation; but oftener he was content to paint in a spirit of dull *laissez faire*, till a blank would come before his eyes, and compel him to desist. Once, even, in the bitterness of his heart, he obliterated a finished drawing with a covering of white lead.

It began to be whispered about that Maxwell's patrons were "cooling down"—that they were beginning to satirize his efforts, and under-estimate them as much as they had previously over-lauded them. His fellow-artists were indulgent to him, as to a man who was "peculiar," and never likely to be tempted to any ephemeral display.

"He is waiting for the afflatus," said Newton, with a shrug. "It's not *his* fault if hopes have been raised which are never likely to be fulfilled. Only one amongst the hundred cases of making a single successful hit by a lucky fluke. He's careless, or lazy—one of your might-have-beens."

These reports reached Frank Dillon, who

looked upon Bryan Maxwell as morally head and shoulders taller than most of the men he met with.

"Going to fail, is he, after his success—and because he is 'odd'?" he answered impetuously to one of Bryan's detractors. "'Oddities' like Maxwell form the salt of society. I'm rather thankful for his failure, since now we shall be able to see if the man exists who is able to stand the crucial test of the applause which once greeted him sinking into neglect. There mayn't be so much of the genius in him as we once were inclined to think. But there's a good deal of the stuff of the hero, which I take it is rarer still."

Dillon's speech was followed up by a speedy visit to the studio of his *protégé*. He recommended Maxwell to try other subjects, more suitable to the English market, if he could not accomplish his present commissions. And Bryan answered, in a tone which was new to him, that he "would not truckle or pander to

the fashion of a passing hour.”——“It would be a sort of flunkeydom,” he added, “which would be positively hateful to me. I would rather abandon my profession outright.”

Dillon attempted to argue.

“There must needs be a fashion in picture-buying as in bookselling,” he said. “The severer kinds of study are generally unsaleable. Don’t you know I always told you you couldn’t live on æsthetics?”

“If I were independent in money matters,” answered Bryan, “I might pursue my art happily, and make it pay in time.”

“Pursue it as you like, then—your credit is good. I may congratulate you on the fact that there are plenty to lend you money. A man with talents like yours must repay it with interest.”

“In the mercantile world that sort of thing might succeed,” answered Bryan wearily. “But if it is to come to that, I would rather throw up my profession and travel with the meagre funds I have left.”

"Travel by all means," responded the practical Dillon; "absolute idleness is just the one thing in the world for you. The mind that lies fallow for a time stores up the richest harvests. And now I come to think of it, why don't you go to Munich; it's fifty to one better than Italy now."

"I don't think I should care for either Munich or Italy."

"Ah, I understand; you want to get away from shop. Get away from it as fast as you can, and for as long as you are able, and when you come back again confine yourself to possibilities."

It was the wisest advice he could possibly have given him. For Bryan was losing his hope and his love for art. All his little stock in trade—his original ideas, and his high aspirations, were suddenly forsaking him. He was beginning to ask himself the question, "Had the announcing spirits whispered truly in his ear? Did he possess the smallest spark of the great creative power?"

The Bohemians saw little of him during his short stay in Town. He avoided his usual haunts. But those who followed Dillon's example, and came to Fitzroy Street to look him up, noticed a palpable change in him, and saw the tired down-trodden look which he made no effort to hide. "*Esse quam videri*" had been ever Bryan's motto; the necessity for acting never entered into his calculations.

The observers drew their own inferences, and felt certain that this man would soon add another name to those of the scores of hapless mortals, who are doomed to struggle hopelessly for a footing on the ladder of fame.

Many comments were made by Bryan's one-time friends on the uselessness of intellect without a measure of common-sense, on the absurdity of burying one's-self "like a rat in a hole," or on the folly of abusing a fine constitution.

Some of the fraternity thought that he was too artistic by temperament, too constitution-

ally sensitive, ever to have been even-spirited. Others concluded that he was "down" because he smoked too much; wanted rousing by society, or a little more nourishment.

So he was invited to lunches of cold mutton and pickles, with abundant half-and-half, to make him less "white, and skinny, and shaky;" or he was urgently entreated to be present at oyster-suppers, by way of improving his digestion.

"People who digest well," as some one says, "never have low spirits; the blue devils are merely a physical matter."

But the oyster-suppers did not cure Bryan, though he was too good-natured to refuse one or two of the invitations. And when the June roses had blown and died, he carried out his resolution of scraping the remainder of his savings together, abandoning his brush altogether for a time, and going abroad.

For he had no more strength left for the struggle; bone and muscle seemed to have failed him. No reaction had succeeded to

his nervous prostration, no wholesome sleep had visited him as yet. He groaned in spirit as he thought of his weakened powers, and the consequent obscurity to which he must be doomed. He did not think these things would kill him, but he knew that the zest had gone out of his life. He thought it better to leave his old lodgings, where memories were intertwined with every picture, every book. If it was to be a question of suffering, no suffering could be so terrible as that which continued without change. So in the beginning of July, Bryan gave up his apartments, sold his furniture, and went to the Tyrol.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW days after her engagement to Ross with Maxwell, Sara stood by the looking-glass in her bed-room, trying on a necklace which he had sent to her as his first present.

"I will do the thing handsomely if I do it at all," he had said to himself. And ~~the~~ necklace ~~was a handsome one~~, of a very uncommon pattern, and of rare and cunning workmanship. A trinket which could not be worn in society without attracting notice for its beautiful combination of gold and sapphires. "It had been," as he wrote to her, "an heirloom in his family; it had belonged to his mother. Would his future wife honour him by consenting to wear it as a pledge?"

"As a pledge!" repeated Sara, bitterly, to herself, as she stood with her hair loose upon her shoulders, and the May sunshine streaming upon the bright thing which was sparkling on her neck. "A pledge of *what?* of the hollow mockery which must stand me instead of the life of which I dreamt? What a child I must have been when I talked to Charley about loving! And now must come that daily dying to childhood, love, and beauty, which is always going on in this weary world. My gaily-dressed fancies are turning to black-clad images, after the common order of things; it was time the dust-feathers were rubbed from the wings of the butterfly."

No, it was not time. The *vanitas vanitatum* had come to this girl, for the same reason that it came to the preacher of old. She was thirsting as he thirsted, with a thirst which could not be sated; crunching the ashes of a sorrow which she had brought upon herself between her teeth, in vexation and bitterness of spirit.

She looked again at the image reflected in the looking-glass, then pulled violently at the clasp of the necklace, and let it fall at her feet as if it had stung her.

"An heirloom in his family," she exclaimed. "How could I forget that Bryan's mother wore it?"

It was not often that she could trust herself to think of Bryan. It required all her strength of will to stifle the whisper which occasionally rose in her heart. "Ought she to have trusted him? could she have been hasty in judging him, after all?" But now she remembered that Clarice Maxwell had been pure and good, a "pattern," as she said scornfully to herself, "of all the domestic perfections!" What right had *she* to wear the jewels which such a woman had worn?

"And yet a few days ago——" she began, and would not allow herself to finish the sentence. "Was it not all like a terrible dream? Must she not go on with it, whatever it might involve? Was any

good to be gained by looking back now?"

"No, no one can help me," she thought, wringing her hands. "I have given my word. I dare not—cannot go back."

A servant came to tell her that Mr. Maxwell was in the drawing-room, waiting to see her. She fastened up her dress, re-arranged her hair, and carelessly stooped to pick up the ornament and replace it in its case. It was not broken.

"It would not have mattered if it had been," she thought, as she locked it in a drawer. "I suppose I must accept it. Why should I scorn his gift? why not be willing to please some one else, even if I am sick at heart myself? But I shall *never* wear it. Even if it did not remind me of Bryan's mother, it would seem to me as if this man wanted to bind me. The necklace would be recognized, of course, and therefore I am expected to wear it to please him. He needn't be afraid. I shall keep to my engagement, but I will not be tied by such devices as these."

She swept wearily into the drawing-room, holding out a limp hand to Rosswith, who came to meet her with eager enthusiasm. She was sorry for him, as she saw the brightness in his eyes, and the flush on his cheeks; but "all her soul rounded and hardened in its separateness" when they met.

She answered his questions in a matter-of-fact way. When he asked her to sing to him, she sang. When he requested to see her paintings, she brought them; and watched him with an imperceptible curl of her upper lip, as he singled out the inferior ones and honoured them with his loudest praise. Rosswith stayed for more than an hour, and during that time the conversation never flagged. It was one of Rosswith's favourite habits to keep up a constant stream of small talk. He fancied "the women" would be offended with him if he did not make superhuman efforts to be amusing; and Sara, at this time, had equally a horror of pauses. If it struck Ross that there were

none of the childish absurdities, none of the exquisite silences which had marked the period of his love-making with the simple-hearted Dorothy, he never thought of lamenting the absence of these things.

"He had wooed the lamb," as he said jauntily to himself, "and now he was wooing the lioness!"

He had some reason for applying the latter epithet to Sara, for in his presence she was more than usually irritable. All might be, as Rosswith called it, "smooth sailing" for a time, when suddenly her brow would contract and her whole appearance change. The accident might be a purely subjective one, but she indulged the whim at once, whatever it might chance to be. She recognised no necessity for making herself agreeable.

At the conclusion of his visit Rosswith lingered, and tremblingly approached a subject which was of great importance to him.

"Would she not authorize him," he asked,

"to speak openly of their approaching marriage? There could surely be no reason for silence, now that Mr. Routh was acquainted with the facts; and it was time," he thought, "that the engagement should be made public."

"As you like," answered Sara languidly, with the *laissez-faire* manner which was so new to her, "it can't make much difference now. But I don't see how it matters one way or another."

"You forget that you are unusually beautiful," he said with a gallantry which came naturally to him. "It can't be pleasant to me to see other men coveting my treasure."

"As to that," she answered superciliously, "you are mistaken if you suppose that the fact of my engagement being known will affect my conduct in the least. I shall never be a meek, subservient wife, considerate to a husband's whims. And I mean to enjoy myself in the world. Ordinary life in its usual

humdrum fashion will not be endurable to me."

He was stung by her tone. She had told him what he was to expect, and yet it was hard to bear.

"You conceal our engagement, as if you wished to cancel it," he said.

"Cancel it if you like, or proclaim it if you like; it is a matter of indifference to me, only it is not for *me* to stir in the matter," she answered haughtily.

The colour flew to his forehead, but he controlled himself by an effort. However provoking her cool manner might be, he could not afford to be provoked.

Yet his proud nature revolted from such treatment. "It's a hardish leap to take," he thought to himself as he left her that day. "Yet the more abominably she behaves, the more curiously I seem to care about her."

Miss Armitage watched Rosswith anxiously during these first visits to Curzon Street. "He was a little dandyish," she thought;

“there was a dash of something about him which she did not like.” But the dear old lady was not suspicious. It went some way with her that Rosswith was handsome, and his compliments to herself were not exactly unpleasant.

“Only Sallie—why was Sallie so altered? why was there that restlessness about her which would not allow her to be at peace?”

She put some close questions to her niece that evening, departing for once from the contract of silence between them.

“I like him on the whole,” the girl answered abruptly. “He is not disagreeable to me.”

“Not disagreeable!” echoed Miss Armitage, unable to express her wonder. “Was that the way in which Sara could speak of the man she had promised to marry?”

Meanwhile invitations poured in, and Sara plunged into all the gaieties of the season. She had abused the world, and tried to sit lightly to its opinions. But she began to

feel that its enchantment was pleasant. She was listening to the voice of the siren, and found that it helped her to forget the past. "Could she do a more stupid thing," she asked herself, "than to shut herself up like an invalid, voluntarily increasing morbid sensitiveness by the exclusion of loud noises and sudden lights?"

The counter-irritants which she had hitherto tried had failed, and her bright ideal world could not be exchanged at once for the blighting outer air of commonplace life. At first she had tried to study foreign languages, to read serious books—anything to break her mind on. But soon she wearied of this maigre diet, and plunged into a life of continual excitement, scattering thought to the four winds—indulging in self-intoxication with a vague hope of escaping self. It was a round of incessant dissipation and fatigue, under which she did not grow languid or lustreless. For a time, on the contrary, she seemed to thrive and brighten; she felt as if the blood flowed

faster in her veins. If physical prostration came on at all, it was only when the stimulant was withdrawn—a certain sign of the deleterious effect of the dram-drinking.

Aunt Jenny complained that she “saw nothing of her niece.” The constant succession of flower-shows, *matinées musicales*, rides on horseback, picnics and balls, left little time for Sara to attend to Miss Armitage.

“I ought to have known it would be so, when once she was engaged to be married,” thought the lady with a sigh to herself. “But it is something new for her to neglect me.”

Sara was far from intending such neglect. Her conscience was smitten when, after one of her daily absences, she found Aunt Jenny taken suddenly ill, and suffering from all the symptoms of her former ailment, only in a more aggravated form.

“I shall stay at home to-night,” she said to the doctor who was in attendance. “No one can see to her as well as I can.”

She did stay, and excluded all the servants from the room but one paid nurse, who had been summoned in the alarm.

And Miss Armitage, waking on the following morning, with the sense of weakness which follows upon an attack of pain, watched Sara gliding about the room, arranging every little article of furniture, putting fresh flowers in the vases, and looping the window-curtains as no hired attendant could have done, and closed her eyes again with a sense of unreality.

CHAPTER XV.

AUNT JENNY'S bedroom in Curzon Street belonged, like its owner, to the old world rather than the new. There were *pot-pourri* jars, to which she attached an altogether mythical value, and a few Chinese ornaments which her brother, who had been a captain in the Navy, had brought to her thirty years before. In the centre of the apartment stood an antique four-post bed, which Sara had purchased because she knew that her Annt had a weakness for such accommodation; whilst the walls were adorned with queer prints of Prince Leopold and Princess Charlotte, which Miss Armitage had cherished from her girlhood.

Sara grew weary enough of the old-fashioned apartment during this stage of her history. For Janet Armitage was seriously ill again; and her niece, who knew nothing of method (because she cared nothing about it), tossed her aunt's letters on one side and forgot them. She was not familiar with Bryan Maxwell's handwriting, and his note, with the enclosed cheque, shared the fate of Miss Armitage's other correspondence. The household in Curzon Street was a strange one at this time. Aunt Jenny's ailment proved to be a neglected cold turning to inflammation of the lungs; and Sara alternated between a devoted sick-nurse, and a Belgravian butterfly. She spent one night by the quiet bedside of the invalid and the next in the heat and glare of the opera or the ball-room.

In vain her guardian urged her to take rest, and ventured to suggest the impropriety of her proceedings. In vain he sent other sick nurses, declaring that Miss Armitage should have one for the night as well as for the day,

and busied himself with hunting up unexceptionable chaperones. Sara would have none, but those of her own choosing. She went and came as she pleased, drove the nurse from her Aunt's room when it suited her to monopolize her post, set the doctor at defiance, and saw Ross as seldom as she could.

For a time the excitement seemed to satisfy her. And even Lawrence Routh,—who had been so accustomed to study the characters of others, that he could throw his plummet beneath the smooth surface of the waters, and take depth and measure where most observers would have been puzzled;—even he was ready to conclude that no greater harm had been inflicted upon Sara than the most trifling heart-graze, which would easily be healed. He did not know how the malady of Disgust was gaining upon her, how her affected gaiety was only a sham and a delusion; her sunniest smile, the smile of the victim. He thought she looked pale some-

times—perhaps a little bored. These things could not escape him who was so accustomed to watch every change in her face. Yet she encased herself so completely in impervious armour, that he did not see any sign of irritation or annoyance, and could not tell how she was secretly fretted by the iron of her chain.

It was Rosswith who suffered most from the her conduct. This was a crisis in his history when his nature had become more yielding, more fitted to receive a softer and better state of things. Sometimes he lazily wished, as many a man of his stamp does wish, that he could have time to remedy a few things which were wrong, or that he were able to live a part of his life again. Sara was in some respects a new discovery to him: an experience stimulating enough to make him see fresh light. She might have influenced him for good, had she believed in or cared for any such influence. But she had begun by losing faith in herself, and it was

not strange that she distrusted her fellow-creatures.

It could not escape Rosswith's penetration that she endeavoured to avoid his society, and that she was ready to grasp at anything which might delay the marriage. It was fortunate that Sara did not pry into his past history, and did not want to know more about him than was absolutely necessary. But it was irritating to be forced to meet her out in society, to find her listening to the complimentary speeches of other men, and to know that it would be impossible for him to edge in a word.

"Can you not behave a little more as if you are engaged?" he said to her one day with a weak attempt at setting things right.

"I *do* behave as if I were engaged. I am not aware how I am to behave any differently," she answered.

"You seem to listen very complacently to other people's pretty speeches," he added sulkily.

And she turned from him with a proud smile which he could not understand.

"What is the use of my explaining?" she thought. "Would he believe that I am sick of being plied with flattery? I, who once dreamt of a useful existence, sanctified to noble ends, and beautified with a complete and satisfying love! How can I possibly make him understand that the homage I receive is only a mockery; that I writhe under every complimentary speech as if it were a sword-thrust; oh, this cruel social penance of keeping up appearances!"

"They call her haughty," he thought to himself in one of the fits of passionate anger which he dared not vent in her presence; "the word scarcely expresses what she is! A sort of female Lucifer, giving herself the airs of a tragedy-queen."

After this he was not quite in such a hurry to expedite matters. But Sara continued to be an excuse for his constantly running up

to town, though the greater part of his time was spent at his club.

The contest which had been going on between the worse part of him and the better was now at an end for ever. The voice of the secret monitor could never be heard with effect again. And yet he was sorry. He could not but remember the woman who had loved him so endearingly, so intensely, that he could never expect to be loved by anyone in like fashion again. And he tried to stifle the remembrance, for it made him heartsore.

Meanwhile the days went on, and Aunt Jenny was neither better nor worse. Her niece was beginning to be tired—always tired, when she allowed herself time to think about it. Never was any poor woman more ready to cry with Solomon—“Vanity of vanities!” She remembered the time when she had wished to be fair, but what would she have given now to be *free*?

“Poor thing,” she thought in a sort of pity-

ing way of herself, "they talk of my beauty and my riches—they envy me—*me*, not knowing that I am blind, and wretched, and miserable."

Often, as her maid complained, she would come home white as marble from an evening party, and sit with her hands folded upon her knees, not knowing whether her hair had been taken down or not; and then suddenly awake, as if from a dream, in one of her most capricious and wayward of moods.

The world was already beginning to talk, as it usually does in such cases as these. There were ladies who protested more decidedly than ever, that Miss Trevanion was not in "their style," and that she dressed in bad taste; and there were others who hinted that her behaviour was decidedly "fast."

This was more than Lawrence Routh could endure, and he had one more earnest talk with his ward. A talk in which he was more outspoken than usual, and tried to frighten her by prophesying that her affairs might come

to be discussed in smoking-rooms and servants' halls, as well as in more refined drawing-rooms.

"It is difficult," he said, "to put down this sort of thing, when once it begins. A motherless girl cannot be too careful, and the circumstances of your engagement are already provoking comment."

She resented this interference, as if founded on a mere delusion.

"Let them talk till they are hoarse!" she said irritably, "What do I care? Mr. Maxwell and I have no concern in it; they will not lower me in *his* esteem. Of course they pick me to pieces, as they would pick anyone to pieces to amuse themselves. There are people in the world who always give themselves airs, when anyone else attracts notice."

"I am afraid you attach too much importance to admiration," he said, "You throw yourself open to criticism, and then imagine you can defy it."

"I don't defy it, I simply don't care for it,"

she said contemptuously. "I would brush these things away like useless burrs, and most people would be wiser if they followed my example. It is all or nothing, when one gets into fashion, all bowing down to you, or all snubbing. I have had experience of both styles of treatment. But you are very much mistaken if you think I care for admiration. The people are very polite indeed;—to my fine clothes. But as to my looks," she added, with a sudden access of passion, "do you think I set much store upon them? There are times when I would as soon look at a Medusa's head, as catch a sight of my own face in the glass."

He gained hope from this outburst, this sudden break in the ice. Sara had shown signs of some real emotion. Perhaps even now he might save her from herself; after all she might not set her affections merely upon this self-seeking world. But there was no real peace after this conversation, only a hollow truce between them.

Mr. Routh determined not to visit Curzon Street more than was absolutely necessary. He could not influence Sara for good as long as she continued in her present humour, and he persuaded himself that he had better keep away. Only sometimes he seemed to be drawn by invisible chords to the places where he might feast his eyes upon her beauty.

And once when, at a dangerous hour in the afternoon, he sauntered into the park by way of the Albert Gate; when the carriages were deadlocked so that he could not pursue his way, but had to gaze, whether he would or no, at the spectacle of well-dressed good-looking people, in all the array of pomp and fashion, and everything which could minister to the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life," Sara passed him suddenly on horseback, in company with the man she had promised to marry. He had advised her to let herself be seen in public with Rosswith. Why then did he fret and chafe as from a hidden dagger-thrust, as he leant against the

railings looking after her, and wondering at her ease and self-possession? She did not recognize him, but he had hardly expected her to do so. He was wearing an ill-cut coat and a pair of dusty boots, and—for the matter of that—he would willingly have taken a cotton umbrella, that he might parade it in the face of this crowd of comfortable looking people.

“I didn’t expect her to look at me,” he thought, “but that is not a safe animal for her to ride. A pretty beginning for Maxwell to be so careless.”

Yet as he turned away it did not escape his notice that Sara seemed to enjoy the rearing and plunging of the spirited horse, far more than her companion did. Rosswith looked nervous, and unpleasantly conscious of the notice she was attracting.

Lawrence Routh left the park in one of the bitterest of his cynical moods. The millions of dismal half-baked bricks, and the din and roar of the everlasting streets, seemed as hateful to him as the park itself with

the grass trodden off by the footsteps of thousands, and with innumerable blackened leaves on the trees. He could not fancy, as Carlyle had done, the "stars and the eternities" looking down on these money-getting insensible Londoners.

"She is just like the rest of them," he said to himself, "all for show, all for parade, trust a woman for that; ready to risk her neck for a little applause;—as if I were not broken into it by this time; as if I were not ready to laugh and shrug my shoulders at the phases of that comedy which always takes the place of tragedy in this matter-of-fact life,—grinning at the troubles of youth, in commonplace middle age. But *she* is so young for this sort of thing,—so young to be utterly devoid of heart."

That evening Aunt Jenny was worse. The doctor came and looked grave. He told Sara, for the first time, that Miss Armitage must have borne with unusual patience a vast

amount of suffering already, and that she needed "the greatest care."

Sara would not leave her for the whole of that night, and the greater part of the next day.

"Is it anything serious?" she forced herself to ask when Mr. Spence came. He did not give her a decided answer, but his face answered for him.

Lawrence Routh might have reversed his verdict respecting Sara's want of heart, could he have seen her during the anxious hours of that day.

For the first time she realized the dangerous nature of the illness.

Only once during the silent watch, Miss Armistage opened her eyes and smiled faintly at her niece.

"I suppose it must be true," thought Sara, "if we are to believe the Bible, that she will soon win the white robes and the saint's immortal crown. But the very fact of such victory seems to shut her out from me. The better part of

me is dying, whilst my mere physical existence continues. Everything is wrong. God send the repentance may not come too late." And then she fell into a reverie, whilst the sentence recurred mechanically to her memory, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed—" I do not know that she attached any special meaning to the words, but she could not shake them off; and I, who believe in guardian angels, think perhaps her angel suggested them to her.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was late in the month of October, far away from the "busy haunts of men" in a little lonely village on the southern coast of Wales. There was only one large lodging-house in the village, which was frequented by visitors in the season; but even this was deserted now, and given over to sea-mists and partial dilapidation. Otherwise a cluster of cottages made up the entire habitations. These stood upon a wooded knoll, remarkable for its beauty in the summer-time. But the woods were already damp and bare in places, with the verdure nipped by the sweeping breath of the fierce salt sea, whose blustering grey waves were beating a little

way off in Otswold Bay. There were a few clusters of dahlias, and a few flame-tinted chrysanthemums, planted in regular lines in the little cottage gardens, and contributing their quota of warmer colour to the foreground of one of the finest coast scenes in Britain. The brilliant red and yellow contrasted with the hues of the jagged tors in the distance, where the tints varied from a sober neutral tone to that of the fading heather, or masses of rich autumnal fern.

The weather had been wet for the last few days; and a little brook, which was generally dry in the summer, went singing on between gorges and ravines, bestrewn with stones which were some of them bare, and some of them moss-grown. It ran singing on its way without brawling noise, but making a soothing, monotonous sound, which seemed to be in keeping with the hemlocks on its banks, with the alder bushes which had already cast their leaves, and with the figure of a little old woman, with bright eyes and wrinkled

cheeks raddled with red like radishes, who stood at one of the cottage doors waiting anxiously for the arrival of the doctor.

She looked the perfection of neatness in her stiff high hat, and a brown stuff gown which was spotlessly clean. The hat was Welsh, but the cut of her gown, the make of her collar and cuffs, and everything else about her, was scrupulously English. For Martha Griffiths had not much in common with Taffyland. She had lived for years as a servant with a family in Devonshire, and rather prided herself in her unlikeness to the blowsy, hard-featured aborigines of Otswold. She looked with some disapproval at the untidy condition of the doctor, who arrived, after a time, on a rough pony, which, like its master, was unkempt and flecked with mud. He wore leather gaiters and a wide-awake hat, beneath which his cheery, weather-beaten face smiled the normal smile of encouraging benevolence, which it smiled impartially on the living and the dying.

"Well, Mrs. Griffiths, and how's our invalid? Any news from her sister? We must try and keep her up till the advertisement is answered."

Mrs. Griffiths did not speak, but only put her handkerchief to her eyes; and Mr. Rayner (who, by-the-by, was not Welsh, but one of the many itinerants in his profession who realize the meaning of a certain truism referring to "rolling stones") had by this time jumped down from the saddle and given the bridle of his pony to an urchin to hold. He stood waiting for a moment, and then repeated impatiently,

"Is there any improvement—any sign of a change?"

"None, sir, none," answered the old woman, not trying to check the tears which were rolling down her wrinkled cheeks; and then she added hesitatingly, "I think if there is any change, sir, that she's—about the same."

The doctor repressed an inclination to di-

verge into a more thoroughly defined smile, and answered gently,

“Well, anything will be better than to see her suffer as she has done. That terrible delirium—you wouldn’t wish it to return? And you know I told you long ago, Martha, it could only be a question of time.”

“Yes, sir, I used to be a little flustered at first at her queer ways—coming to me all that long way by herself—and lying like a dead thing by our door. It was a mercy that my husband was coming home late, or she might have been real dead of the cold before mornin’, and so pale and thin that I should never have known her. How dreadful ill she did look to be sure, staring at us, and asking us things that we didn’t know about, in that desperate fierce sort of a way that never was nat’ral to her. ‘Let me write to your sister, my deary,’ I used to say; ‘I know as she would come directly she hear-ed!’ And then she would cry out with a curious sort of laugh, and say to some one else—I’m

sure as it wasn't me—'No more pretences. I know as you lied when you said that you loved me! in a fearful sort of a voice. And such a nice young lady as she used to be—to be sure, so quiet in her ways, and so thoughtful of folks' comfort. They ought to be cried shame on as have brought her to this. Oh, Mr. Rayner, it's beyond everything to me that God A'mighty doesn't punish people for going on so cruel."

"We have nothing to do with that. Perhaps He is punishing them now," answered the doctor, who was used to Mrs. Griffiths's harangues, and endured them as one of the penances of life (the old woman prided herself on her good English, and was wont to talk garrulously whenever she was excited). "But you know, I told you that the end must come, and it is coming—sooner even than I expected."

"Yes, sir; I said, when I see her first, 'There'll never be another spring for her. She'll never be no better—not in this world.

God forgive them as has done it, but they've been and broke her heart between 'em. And when my old man was a grambling at the expense, after her money was gone and she couldn't pay us for her bits of things, I said I knowd we shouldn't be let suffer—and it couldn't be for long—just a few weeks. And how could I have the heart to turn her away, when she opened her white lips, and said, 'Martha,' says she, 'don't ask me no questions—but I've tried to crawl to you. I had nobody left to come to but you.'

"I am sure, Mrs. Griffiths, you have done a good work. It proved that throughout her half-mania, the poor girl's instincts must have been right, or she would never have thought of coming to you," answered the doctor, as he cut the conversation short by making his way into the cottage.

There, in a small bare room, but made as comfortable as kind hands could make it, in a little white dimity bed, with shawls piled over it to make it warmer, lay a girl who was

visibly dying. Death was written legibly on the purple-veined forehead, the hollow cheeks, and the glittering eyes. She had been fair exceedingly, but that had passed away. There was little beauty to be discerned in the waxen pallor of the face which was motionless, rigid, and older than her years. The skin was stretched tightly over the emaciated features, and the hair, damp and thin, was pushed back from the forehead.

Mr. Rayner had seen her under almost every phase of suffering. He had been called to her in the night of the same day, months ago, when, having arrived early by the steamer at Swansea, she had made her way on foot to Otswold Bay—toiling across field-paths, and through muddy lanes, with sleet and rain driving against her face, conscious of but one object—to reach old Martha's cottage and rest. Rest! what a mockery it seemed to her to use the word. Would rest ever come to her again in this world? could she wish for anything but oblivion? Her feet

were sore, and her body was bent with the fatigue which she had endured during the preceding days; but she walked on with a will beyond her strength, and came at last to the turning of the road which led to her nurse's house. Night was closing in. Her clothes were wet through with the drizzling rain, and her limbs were tottering beneath her; but she felt mechanically to satisfy herself that her tiny bundle of clothes and her little store of money were safe, and then made her way to the door of the last cottage in the row, which she knew by the old woman's description must be Martha's.

A keen air was blowing from the sea, which Dorothy could see steel-blue in the distance.

She drew her shawl closer round her, and then the physical reaction overcame her. Her senses reeled, a sort of stupor came over her, like a beginning of the transitional sleep. She was not conscious of any discomfort, any chill, when she fell prostrate in

the porch of the cottage—lying there in the wind and the rain.

Mr. Rayner had been present, holding a cup of something warm to her lips, when she opened her eyes, and found herself in the little white bed, with the kind face of a woman, with which she seemed to be familiar, bending anxiously over her, and asking her questions.

Dorothy could give no account of herself, for, though she had recovered from the swoon which had been produced by cold and fasting, fever was succeeding, and her soul was soon wrapped again in the dreary blank of unconsciousness. For weeks she lay like a wounded bird that had lost the power of moving its wings, except for the miserable intervals of excitement when her poor heart was laid bare in the ravings of delirium, and when others became aware of the rack on which she had been stretched.

Mr. Rayner had seen her with the despair-

ing defiant look—now piteous, now wild, distorting her features. He had seen her again lately, when the fever had subsided, with a hopeless, miserable stare in her face, as if she were already dead through her weariness of life,—a look which had been more terrible to witness than any violent paroxysm. But he no sooner entered the room to-day, with old Martha at his heels, than he became aware that another change had taken place since his absence. The frenzied agony had gone, never to return. The blank gaze of despair had gone, and the seal of peace was set upon the dying girl's brow. It gave her an unearthly appearance, as if she had "parted with her eyes in prayer," and as if her lips were become the "porches of the Spiritland."

"I have just been dreaming," she said to him as he entered. And her face was shining still with the sublime unreason of her dream. "I can scarcely tell what is fancy, or what is not," she explained; "there are such tangles in my brain. But somehow it seemed like going

home, and I mix the old home up with the new."

It was true. Her thoughts were travelling back to the happy cottage in Devonshire. She wandered upstairs and downstairs in every nook and corner, and saw every object, as if bathed in the dim light of evening.

"Is that the old greyhound?" she asked, "scratching at the window-panes?"

She raised herself and listened, when the doctor did not answer; but nothing was to be heard but the monotonous singing of the stream, and the distant dirge of the waves which were beating in the bay.

"Ah! I see," she said struggling again with the slippery threads of memory, and striving in dim shadow-land after vanishing images, "you will think me very foolish, but indeed I cannot help it. The fancies are so pleasant that I like to believe them real. I thought I saw my father there upon his favourite seat. He has been keeping me com-

pany half the morning, and then I feel so safe."

Mr. Rayner only smiled. She evidently did not know to whom she was speaking, for hitherto she had had but one thought in the presence of others—to draw herself shrinkingly away from their observation. But if the fevered fancies of her brain were still taking ghostly shapes, it was well that the tenor of these fancies had changed. On the very spot where she now saw the loving figure of her father, the poor child had sometimes struggled half prostrate throughout the night, ready to accuse the whole world in her agony, and yet casting herself on God's mercy to save her from the injustice of man.

She sank back exhausted, burying her face in the pillow. The doctor stood for a minute watching her, and then gently left the room, followed by Mrs. Griffiths.

"She is going fast," he said, "faster than I expected. But you ought to be very thank-

ful. There will be nothing more for her to suffer. You can give her small doses of the soothing medicine, if she should ask for it, but there will be no more pain for us to alleviate. I doubt if she will last beyond the night."

"And poor Miss Charley, sir," said the old woman, wringing her hands. "She *would* not let me do anything before. It was just the sorrow that was eating away her heart, poor dear! and made her forget to tell me about it."

But Dorothy had not forgotten; for when Mr. Rayner had ridden away, and when the old woman came noiselessly into the room, she roused once more, and the light of life came into her face.

"Is there any news, Martha?"

"None, none, my dearie! Lie still."

"I thought I had done with hope," sighed the girl, "but if I could but see her once. Do you think they will ever see the advertisement? Oh! I was wrong not to try be-

fore. Do you think she has forgotten by this time who Dollie is—do you? Oh! Charley!—Charley!”

“Hush!—hush! my dear, she will come—she will come,” said the old woman, with a rush of pitying tears.

The girl looked at her with dry eyes. She could not catch the infection of her weeping, no such relief was granted to her.

“Ah! you are so sorry,” she said, reaching out her weak hands, with a smile and a caress of infinite pathos. “Don’t be sorry for me. It will be soon over—soon over now—the pain and the weariness. And I shall lie ‘within the light of God,’”—clasping her fingers and murmuring—“‘where the weary are at rest.’ It is only weariness now, Martha, I am hardly conscious of any pain, I seem to have got used to it. I can put it all behind me, and feel to have done with it. My time has come. I knew from the first it would be so.”

"Poor dear!" said Mrs. Griffiths, with a deep sigh.

"No," she said, with a sudden flush, "I wish Charley would come, but I am not poor now. I *was* poor—so poor—when you saved me from death at first—when you 'took me in,'" she added, raising her eyes with a sudden rush of meaning. "But I am not poor now. I am not depressed any more. I can leave it all to God."

"Perhaps I had better have borne the outrage," she murmured inaudibly to herself. "It seems as if it would have been so easy now."

All doubts had gone, all painful sense of misconstruction. Already she was hearing the "Fiat lux," and the false appearances of Time were dwindling to their true dimensions. Now that the purification of suffering had come—now that the healing had succeeded to the bruising—the sorrows of her past life seemed to her fantastic and exaggerated. The strange woes which had come stealing upon her like

weird mysterious things, sitting down with her in this room to keep her company in its solitude, and getting familiarized with her, were now as if they never had been.

In the days which had dragged wearily on, when she had been contented to lie crushed and hopeless without trying to save herself from her fate, she had been haunted by the recollection of Rosswith's face, which seemed like a shadow—half smiling, half cynical—continually interposing between her and heaven. There was no such torment to assail her now. The fierceness of the struggle was over, and her heart was not the less tender for the veil having been torn away which had divided her in former times from the kingdom of temptation and passion. The experience of evil in others had come to her with intolerable bitterness at first, but Rosswith's fault seemed a slight one to her now. She was nearing the other kingdom of Infinite Love, and could look at sin like one of God's angels, with eyes in which all hatred and aver-

sion were drowned in dews of pity for the sinner.

Throughout the afternoon she lay with her eyes closed, in utter exhaustion. The temporary excitement, which had enabled her to talk more than usual, seemed to be subsiding,—the “fever called living” had nearly burnt out. Mrs. Griffiths was sick and faint with anxiety about Charley’s arrival, but Dorothy did not ask any more questions, though now and again she framed tender messages for her sister in the shadow of the valley.

The day passed—the night came. Lower and lower ebbd the tide of life.

“Tell me what it is o’clock,” whispered Dorothy faintly. “I am so weak—I can hardly see you—but it sounds to me as if you were crying. Don’t cry, dear—there is nothing to cry about. I only wish I could have lived till Charley came.”

“She will come. It’s not much past twelve,” repeated the woman.

And towards morning Mrs. Griffiths’ ears detected a sound (an unusual one in the

lonely place) of wheels. The wheels came nearer, then they stopped. There was a hurry, a confusion of voices, a sound of feet dashing up the narrow stairs, and a girl—a woman—Charley, wan and worn, knelt by the side of the lost sister—the wanderer so vainly sought, so passionately longed for—found.

“Dollie—my Dollie—speak.”

There was no answer, and Charley, shivering as with cold, looked up in alarm. The light of the dip candle was glimmering on the bed. The coverlet, clean and white, if not fine, was spread carefully over the thin form. One arm only was outside it, and that was white, like the face, with a transparent pallor. There was no tear on the cheek, and the large eyes, though partially open, gave no sign of recognition.

“She is asleep,” said the frightened Mrs. Griffiths, who had followed Charley to the bedside.

Asleep! Was it the sleep that could know

no waking on earth—the sleep that “He giveth to his beloved”?

Might it not be better if it were so, lest in the anguish of her last exhaustion Dorothy could not have known her sister, or lest, even if she had recognized her, she might have been recalled to the bitter memories she had left behind for ever?

Some such thought, in different form, crossed Mrs. Griffiths’ mind as Charley wailed out—

“She will wake—she will speak to me. Oh, my little sister!”

“Hush!” entreated old Martha; “don’t disturb her. You *must* be calm, for her sake. The doctor said as we must not agitate her.”

And then a gleam of consciousness seemed to cross the dizzy brain. Dorothy opened her glassy eyes, and groped for the answering hand.

“Charley,” she murmured, with a smile, “you will remember—it would be sad to die and be—quite—forgotten.”

Then she suddenly raised herself, and cried,

with a voice clear and fresh as in the days of her early girlhood, "Yes, yes, I am coming!" and fell back on the pillow. The eyes closed again, and the breath became more laboured, until it seemed to cease. Charley remained on her knees murmuring prayers for the soul that could no longer pray for itself. She put the fingers which lay on the coverlet to her lips, and kept them there, conscious that they were gradually growing cold.

"All was over now, the hope, the fear and the longing,
All the dull deep pain, and constant anguish of patience."

"She will wake up," wailed Charley, still trying to deceive herself.

"Would you bring her back again, my dearie?" pleaded the kind old broken voice. "She's had a deal of trouble, but she's done with it now."

Done with it, for ever and for ever! Done with despised love, done with slanderous tongues, and gone where "beyond these voices there is peace."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.







